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The Role of Religions and Cults in the Plays of Thomas Middleton.

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MIDDLETON

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col.

PH.D. 1984

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THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS AND CULTS
IN THE PLAYS OF
THOMAS MIDDLETON

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication,
Theatre, and Communication Disorders

by

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ABSTRACT

Most of Thomas Middleton's works, as well as his personal background, indicate that his theological inclinations were Calvinistic. Many of his plays display his regard for "protestant" morality or his contempt for Roman Catholics and fringe elements of the Reform movement. His early and middle plays also satirize Puritans, who, although basically loyal subjects, were offensive to both Elizabeth I and James I because they urged greater reforms within the orthodox Church and criticized practices of which both monarchs were fond. During the reign of James, Puritans, largely from the middle class, became particularly unpopular among the gentry and courtier classes. Since Middleton associated with these upper classes, he joined in the chorus against Puritans during the early years of James' reign, accusing them of greed, licentiousness, hypocrisy, and even heresy. However, as the king's influence caused the official Church to move away from Calvinism and toward Arminianism, Middleton's attitudes toward Puritans softened. Already in agreement with their basic religious and moral values, he began to sympathize with bourgeoisie Puritans, particularly after James attempted

an alliance with England's enemy, Catholic Spain, and after many prominent members of the Puritan faction began to support him and his work.

While few of Middleton's plays straightforwardly glorify the Genevan ideal, those which address "deviant" religious philosophies and cults illustrate his Calvinistic tendencies. The plays in which the protagonists view the honor code or romantic love as religious ideals reveal that Middleton's sympathy lay with characters who remained faithful to Christian principles while simultaneously paying tribute to the honor or romantic precepts. The dramatist never championed those who allowed their dedication to those ethics to supercede Christian spirituality. Rather, he portrayed them as immoral, blind, or depraved, and they unfailingly meet their doom because they have ignored the first commandment.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to determine Thomas Middleton's attitudes toward the various religious philosophies prevalent in London during the late Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras. Selected plays are examined to ascertain what he held dear and what he scorned. Included also is a brief background of orthodox Anglicanism as well as unorthodox religious philosophies: Roman Catholicism, Sectarianism, and the honor code and courtly love tradition which had been elevated to forms of worship during the medieval period.¹ An history outlining England's social and political traditions also becomes important here, because they were so intrinsically related to religion that it is impossible to separate fully the ideas they incorporated.

Middleton's religious beliefs are disputed by critics more than those of any other Renaissance playwright. He has been labeled Puritan, anti-Puritan, Anglican, and indifferent. Bertil Johansson wrote, "Nowhere in Middleton's works do we find an expression of his personal religious beliefs."² Helene Bullock agreed, saying that if his plays did express any moral or religious intent, it was "no more than a pretense, written to please the tastes of the time."³

Others, however, call him religious. Charles A. Hallett says he is a "religious man whose works were profoundly moral and Christian."⁴ Irving Ribner was among the first to recognize that Middleton wrote from a "Calvinistic bias,"⁵ and Margot Heinemann, one of the most recent critics who has researched his religious ties, went so far as to say he was, in fact, a bona fide Puritan.⁶ Many studies seek out the religious ideas in Middleton plays, but generally they ascertain his moral stance more than his religious beliefs. Those who examine specific religious issues deal primarily with his attitudes toward basic Christian principles, excluding other types of religious ideals. While he did write about such Christian elements as Roman Catholicism, Puritanism, and other Reform sects, he did not limit himself to the Christian perspective; he also examined the ideal of honor and "sacred" blood revenge, and the religion of courtly love. Many critics have made assumptions about his religious beliefs without actually working all the evidence into a unified whole or researching the tenets of the particular religious groups and ideals found in his plays.

Two works consulted for this dissertation deal directly with religious influences in Middleton's plays: Bertil Johansson's Religion and Superstition in the Plays of Ben

Jonson and Thomas Middleton (1950) and Margot Heinemann's Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama Under the Early Stuarts (1980). Johansson's study is concerned with specific references to religious practices (fasts, prayers, the saying of Mass, the wearing of official clerical garments) and important religious events (the persecution of Catholics by the English government, the Martin Marprelate controversy, the St. Bartholomew Day massacre of French Huguenots) rather than with the examination of Middleton's attitudes toward religious ideals. Johansson assumes that as a playwright and a member of the gentry, Middleton was anti-Puritan, and he reinforces his arguments by illustrating how unpopular Puritans were among the upper classes and stage players during the reign of James I. Heinemann disagrees completely. According to her, Middleton was himself a moderate Puritan, and she points out that he had enjoyed a lifelong business and personal association with Puritans. While both these authors shed light on Middleton's attitude toward some of the prevailing Christian religious trends of Renaissance England, both are limited in their discussions and in their research. Johansson confuses the practices of radical sects with Puritanism and fails to take Middleton's association with the Puritan element into consideration,

while Heinemann ignores or discredits plays which do not support her thesis. Also, neither study looks at any other than Christian influences in the plays.

Many other valuable criticisms have helped to connect Middleton's plays with moral and religious conventions. Anthony Covatta's Thomas Middleton's City Comedies (1973), George E. Rowe, Jr.'s Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition (1979), and Clifford Davidson's "Middleton and The Family of Love" in English Miscellany, 20 (1969) all discuss the Familist sect in Middleton's The Family of Love, clarifying its tenents and illustrating how Middleton recognized the dangers of that heretical group. C.L. Barber's The Idea of Honor in the English Drama 1591-1700 (1957) and Fredson Bowers' works, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy (1940) and "Middleton's Fair Quarrel and the Duelling Code" in Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 34 (1937) explain how the honor convention in the drama was based upon religious and social precepts. The works of Bowers and Barber also discuss A Fair Quarrel and clarify the religious dilemma of the protagonist, Captain Ager. Lenora Leet Brodwin, author of Elizabethan Love Tragedy (1971) connects The Second Maiden's Tragedy with courtly love traditions.

Other books and articles have been important as historical references. I have relied particularly upon

these works pertaining to the Reformation: Louis B. Wright's Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (1935) and Religion and Empire: The Alliance Between Piety and Commerce in English Expansion (1965); Will Durant's The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin: 1300-1564 (1957) and The Age of Reason Begins (1961); also, Roland H. Bainton's history, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (1952) and William Clark's The Anglican Reformation (1909). Among the books pertaining to Puritanism, T.H. Breen's The Character of a Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England (1970) was helpful, and especially informative about Jacobean political philosophy was Charles Howard McIlwain's introduction to The Political Works of James I (1918). Chivalry (1975), by Michael Foss, The Knight and Chivalry (1974), by Richard Barber, and C.S. Lewis' The Allegory of Love (1958) establish courtly love as a religion. The books of Foss, Barber, and Ruth Kelso's The Doctrine of the English Gentlemen in the Sixteenth Century (1929) also explain the rise of honor and carefully outline the precepts of the honor code.

The following examination details a brief history of England's Reformation and describes various religions and sects of the early seventeenth century, followed by a discussion of eight Middleton plays which deal directly

with religious concepts. The Family of Love (1602) is a satire against Anabaptist sectaries and the courtly love convention. The Puritan (1606) and the christening scene in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1611-3) satirize both Anabaptist and Puritan traits, and Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough (1615-20) mocks middle-class Puritanism only. A Game at Chess (1624) describes the evils inherent within Roman Catholicism as Jacobean Londoners saw it. The works which explore the question of the sacred validity of the honor code include The Second Maiden's Tragedy (1611) and the main plots of A Fair Quarrel (1615-7) and The Changeling (1622). Courtly love also is a topic in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, The Changeling, and The Family of Love.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ See C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Michael Foss, Chivalry (New York: David McKay Company, 1975); Richard Barber, The Knight and Chivalry (Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1974).

² Bertil Johansson, Religion and Superstition in the Plays of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton, vol. VII of Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, ed. S.B. Liljegren (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 51.

³ Helene B. Bullock, "Thomas Middleton and the Fashion in Playmaking," PMLA, 42 (1927), 772.

⁴ Charles A. Hallett, Middleton's Cynics: A Study of Middleton's Insight into the Moral Psychology of the Mediocre Mind, Jacobean Drama Studies, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg, Austria: Institute for English Speech and Literature, 1977), p. 7.

⁵ Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (London: Methuen and Company, 1972), p. 125.

⁶ Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama Under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

CHAPTER 1

THE RELIGIOUS TRADITION:

The Shaping of the English Attitudes

The seventeenth century saw the maturation of both the Reformation and the Renaissance, two movements which had been developing simultaneously and interdependently during the several preceeding centuries. By 1558, when Elizabeth I ascended the throne of England, these two forces had virtually shaped--and now dominated--the world. During her reign, England gradually shed its medieval cloak and assumed the characteristics of an enlightened age. The average citizen gained stature as the last vestiges of the feudal system collapsed and the growing trade market nourished a large and prosperous bourgeois. As wealth became more evenly distributed, education became widely available, at least in London, and as people began to familiarize themselves with the Bible and with new religious ideas from Continent reformers, religion became more personal and easier to comprehend than the abstract dogma of the medieval Church had been. Although Elizabeth herself was not deeply concerned with the particulars of her subjects' religious convictions, many forces both

within and outside the governmental system were at work, modifying and intensifying the interest that the average Englishmen and women had in their spiritual relationships. A growing number of them came to believe that they were God's own saints, glorified and redeemed expressly for some divine purpose.

Of course, these characteristics which marked seventeenth century England did not apply to all its citizens, and a good many of them caused dissension and strife within the fabric of the nation. Indeed, these very elements caused the nation to tear itself apart in civil war, to commit regicide against its own king, and to plunge itself into eighteen years (1642-1660) of hysterical reaction against the traditions, the very essence, of what had been England at its finest. It was prior to the civil war, during a time of teeming religious, social, political, and economic activity, that Thomas Middleton made his contribution to the stage and to English literature. Born in 1580,¹ he was a product of this age and of the conflicts, triumphs, and tragedies that it saw. Undoubtedly the spirit of the period contributed to his fertile imagination and to his particular vision. To what extent did the period's prevailing religious trends influence his works? A brief look at England's political

and religious traditions no doubt will provide some insight.

Elizabeth had ascended the throne of a weary and troubled people. Her sister, Mary Tudor, had longed to reinstate Roman Catholicism as England's official and only religion. She married the heir apparent of Catholic Spain, thus allying England with its most hated enemy, and then she followed Spain into a costly and unpopular war against France. In the name of religion, she had burned over three hundred of her Protestant subjects, thrown hundreds more in jails, and forced thousands of others to flee to foreign refuge.² Important domestic social and economic problems had grown unchecked as she singlemindedly led England to the feet of the Pope. At her death, England, despairing, poverty-stricken, and sick of the blood of its own martyrs, looked to Elizabeth to weld the nation back into a united people, to bring prosperity, and to restore its damaged reputation in Europe. The new queen succeeded, at times through force, at others through diplomacy, by the strength of her own will, by the wisdom of those whom she called upon to advise her, and by her subjects' love for her. A master politician whose imperiousness and determination were matched by the love she felt for her subjects and her country, she was able to find compromises amidst extremes and to harness the

restless energy of the people to pull them together for the good of the nation.

Elizabeth had converted to Catholicism during her youth, and while she loved the drama of the Catholic ritual, she was not inclined to love Roman Catholics.³ They had proclaimed her illegitimate since her birth, with no right to the throne. Fearful of Elizabeth's position and of Protestant support for her, her Catholic sister and brother-in-law had treated her harshly, even imprisoning her in the Tower briefly. Vain and strong-willed, this daughter of Henry VIII had no inclination to submit to the Pope even in ecclesiastical matters. Understandably, she favored toleration of the Protestant reformers. They had supported her during Mary's reign, claiming that she, not Mary, was the legitimate issue of Henry VIII, and therefore the rightful sovereign of England, and they rejoiced when she rode through the streets of London, hopeful for a continuation of the reform her father and brother had begun. They were right to rejoice. Elizabeth's first official acts included the release of the reformers Mary had imprisoned. Those in exile flocked home, spiritually exuberant with the heady wine of religious ideals they had encountered on the Continent. Strongly influenced by a Puritan Parliament, she revived her father's Anglican

Church, Edward's Protestant Prayer Book, and the 39 Articles of the Church, which were revised along more Protestant lines. Her own Act of Uniformity (1559) required all English subjects to attend Anglican services regularly. Parliament issued a Bill (1560) in which the monarch, not the pope, was reinstated as the supreme head of the Church and required all clergy to sign it on pain of imprisonment or deprivation of their offices. Those who could not bring themselves to sign either left the country or simply continued to practice their own faiths despite the laws. These offenders, like those who ignored the Act of Uniformity, were rarely called to task in the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, but as dissent grew, and as Catholics and Protestants alike grew more radical, she sanctioned harsher measures to enforce the laws.

The circumstances connected with the arrest and eventual execution of Mary Queen of Scots caused Elizabeth to bear down on all religious dissenters, particularly Catholics. Although Scotland by this time had become a Protestant stronghold, their queen, Mary Stuart, was staunchly Catholic, and therefore the standard bearer of the many Catholics in both Scotland and England. As the great granddaughter of Henry VII, and undoubtedly legitimate at that, many considered her, not Elizabeth, the legal monarch

of England. By common consent she was the next in line to the English throne should Elizabeth die without issue. As the wife of Francis II and therefore the queen of France, she, like all her predecessors, had styled herself the "Queen of England and France" on state papers. It was common in those days for the monarch of France to claim England and vice versa, but Mary's claim made Elizabeth and all England uncomfortable, for if she should have decided to assert that claim through military force, or if Elizabeth should die for any reason, England would have found itself a satellite of a foreign Catholic power.

When her husband died, Mary returned to Scotland, and as long as she remained there, Elizabeth and English Protestants felt reasonably safe from the threat she posed. But Mary did not rule Scotland long. She first alienated the Protestant lords by seizing their lands, and then she turned her Catholic subjects against her by taking a Protestant lover, Lord Bothwell, and becoming implicated in the suspicious death of her husband, Darnley. Forced to abdicate the Scottish throne in favor of her infant son, James, she then fled to England to seek Elizabeth's help, but Elizabeth could not restore her principality without alienating the Scots, nor could she imprison her lest she anger her own Catholic subjects. She procrastinated, but

finally tried her for crimes against the Scottish people, announced an ambiguous verdict, then imprisoned her for nineteen years.

As long as Mary lived, she remained a serious threat to Protestant England. As a Catholic and as the former queen of France, she always represented the possibility of invasion by France or the other major Catholic power, Spain. If Elizabeth should die without issue, Mary would most certainly become queen, bringing with her another unwelcome alliance with one or both of these traditional enemies of England. But the religious issues surrounding Mary were just as important as the political ones. The Protestants, remembering the reign of Bloody Mary, feared another Catholic ruler, and the Catholics desperately desired a halt to the ever-strengthening Reformation.

Among most English Puritans, Elizabeth's position was secure, but a growing minority among Puritans as well as Catholics accepted an ancient Catholic doctrine which asserted that while ruling sovereigns were monarch of their principalities, they had no claim to their subjects' religious consciences. Coupled with this was a basic assumption that most Englishmen had held since the Magna Carta: they had the collective right to judge and depose, or even kill a tyrannical ruler, especially one

who indulges in religious persecution.⁴ Naturally those persecuted for practicing the laws of what they consider the only true faith are likely to see such a sovereign as a heretic and a tyrant. A zealous minority might even believe that one person may be acting as God's instrument if he takes it upon himself to destroy such a despot.

Most of the Puritans during this time remained loyal to the crown; consequently, they adopted a passive approach, preferring to make ecclesiastical changes through the Church and the legal system, but the more desperate Jesuits, who had become the champions for papal supremacy, began to actually try to exercise their "right" to overthrow their "heretical" monarch during the second half of Elizabeth's reign. They provoked a counter revolution which could not be easily suppressed, because Catholic powers on the Continent intervened on behalf of English Catholics and Mary Stuart. The Spanish, constantly looking for ways to weaken and overtake England, after 1580 encouraged the radical Catholics by sending Jesuit priests to England to provoke and organize dissenters. These missionaries not only incited many of the quietly practicing Catholics already in England, but they also won converts from Protestantism to help fight for their cause. The Jesuits, steadily growing in numbers, could not be satisfied with mere toleration, which they believed would mark the death of

Catholicism in England. They began working toward Catholic domination through three possibilities: invasion by a foreign power; armed rebellion and civil war; and the assassination of Elizabeth in order to place Mary on the throne.⁵

Since the French also wanted Elizabeth and her Protestant policies out of the way, the two Catholic powers worked together covertly to undermine English unity and to destroy the queen. In 1570, in an attempt to alienate the English Catholics from Elizabeth and to win their allegiance for Mary, Pope Pius V issued a bull deposing and excommunicating the "Wicked Jezebel of England." This was followed by dozens of attempts on the queen's life by radical religious groups who believed they were doing the will of God. One sophisticated plot was conceived in 1571 by an Italian merchant, Ridolfi, who hoped to free Mary and place her on the throne in Elizabeth's stead, and in 1583, France and Spain plotted to invade England to the same purposes. Parliament responded decisively: in the same year it passed a Bill making it high treason to accuse the queen of heresy or to publish a papal bull in England. Jesuits, who had been involved in some of the plots to kill Elizabeth and crown Mary, were ordered out of the country, and anti-Catholic laws were strengthened. Some Catholics were executed. Despite the religious tenor of these conflicts, Elizabeth insisted that the Catholics she had put to death died for

treason against her majesty, not for political reasons, but it was obviously becoming more and more impossible to be simultaneously a good Catholic and a good Englishman.

Other European affairs caused England to turn against Catholicism and toward more radical forms of Protestantism. In 1572, the weak-minded French King, Charles IX, incited by his mother Catherine de Medici, ordered over 7,000 French Huguenot men, women, and children to be massacred. Pope Gregory XIII called for "Te Deum" in thanksgiving for this; Philip II of Spain angered the English Protestants further by proclaiming Charles IX a "Most Christian King." England officially mourned those Protestant dead for two years, and Elizabeth refused to see the French ambassador during that time.⁶

The Protestant clergy, always vociferously anti-Catholic, had by this time also become extremely anti-Spanish. Harboring resentment and hatred for Philip II, they believed that Spain represented papacy at its nefarious worst. While the average English citizen wanted to maintain an isolationist policy, the Protestant clergy, taking advantage of the pulpit as the best means for propaganda, railed against Spain and all that she stood for. They reminded their congregations that Spain was plundering the riches of the New World and converting the heathens to satanic Catholicism, and

they convinced the public that England had a great destiny overseas to thwart Spain and popery and to bring the Protestant Truth to American soil. Further, they pragmatically pointed out that England could alleviate the plight of her idle poor by developing trade and creating new jobs. This kind of reasoning appealed to the rapidly developing middle classes and the Puritans, who despised idleness almost as much as they despised popery. It became a religious and patriotic concern to challenge the mighty Spanish maritime forces and to stop their rapacious plunder of the New World and their spreading of Catholicism among the heathen.

English "sea dogs," privateers who plundered Spanish ships, became celebrated national heroes, in part because they interfered with Spanish shipping and raided Spanish settlements in the New World. Furious because Elizabeth would not stop such piracy and also angered because England was sending aid to the Protestant Low Countries against Spain, Philip II resolved to punish England. Parma and Spain plotted together to attack England, dethrone Elizabeth, and crown Mary, but these plans were spoiled by the discovery of the Babington plot in 1586. Elizabeth's advisors learned of the plot in its early stages and allowed Mary to become so deeply involved that when it

was exposed, she was immediately tried for treason and condemned to death. Her execution, delayed months by Elizabeth's hesitation, enraged all of Catholic Europe, who considered the Scottish queen a martyr to the Catholic faith. Philip was prompted to send the Spanish Armada against England, but he failed to rally needed support from the English Catholics and the Pope. England's naval forces, commanded by daring adventurers like Drake and Raleigh, and aided by providentially favorable weather conditions, proved themselves the better combatants. In 1588, God seemed to have chosen England to be the major seapower in the world, to rule the seas and claim foreign lands for English Christianity, and to crush the wicked Spanish. The Church bells of all England tolled the victory for days on end. Thomas Middleton was eight years old.

High Anglicans and Puritans forgot their animosity in the fullness of national pride, but the dissension which had been intensifying between the two groups for many years lay quiescent for only a brief time. Even though they had pulled together to circumvent the foreign Catholic plans to dominate the nation, the acrimony between them was long abiding, and it eventually proved more disastrous than the Catholic conspiracies had.

Because Anglicanism was essentially a compromise

between the medieval Church and the Reform movement, and because Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity required all clergy to conform to the Anglican Articles, within the Church structure dwelt a myriad of Christian believers. Men like Archbishop Lambeth leaned toward Catholic theology, and Elizabeth herself, while despising the Pope's claim over her sovereignty, preferred the ornate ritual of the Catholic mass over the more simplified worship popularized by the Reformers.⁷ Parliament, particularly the House of Commons, was decidedly Calvinist, as were many important Church officials. Only the more zealous of the Protestants and Catholics separated from the Church and refused to take the Oath of Uniformity; most of the brethren remained within the fold.

In doctrine, the difference between High Anglicans and Puritans was slight, and in actuality, they can be described as two parties within the same organization rather than as differing religious groups. Since the Anglican Church had been restructured to accommodate Calvinistic theology, relative harmony prevailed, at least at first, among all the conforming elements within the Church on basic issues. Indeed, today it is difficult to discern the differences among many preachers of the different segments by the nature of their writings. Ministers in both camps railed

against the Pope, stage plays, and Church corruption. During Elizabeth's reign, both emphasized salvation through grace by faith, predestination, and the sinful nature of man, and both admonished sovereign and subjects alike to keep the Sabbath day holy.

The main difference between the two parties was that the right-wing Anglicans revered the ceremonies and disciplines which had grown out of the medieval Church and had been handed down through Luther, while the more zealous Puritans, particularly those who had lived in exile during Mary Tudor's reign and had come under the influence of Jean Calvin, wanted to purge the Church of all Catholic trappings. Most of the Puritan ministers conformed to the orthodox Church ritual, even though they objected to those "relics" of the Catholic faith adopted by Anglicanism, for they believed they could effect changes from within the established Church and eventually purge it of all vestiges of popish ceremony. They also wanted to spread the pure, simple Christianity as found among the early disciples. For this, they were called Puritans, at first pejoratively, but later they accepted the term for themselves to define their party lines. Later, as High Anglicans and Puritans became more polarized, other points of disagreement sprang up between the groups, particularly concerning church government, and these differences

multiplied as the seventeenth century wore on. Puritans became more fundamentalist, claiming that anything not sanctioned in the scriptures should not be allowed in the Church service or government, and, after the ascension of James, Anglicans came more and more under the influence of Arminianism.⁸

While there were many Puritan protests about Church ritual and dogma during Elizabeth's reign, she was able to keep the Puritan element in check for many years. Because of her battle with French, Spanish and even English Catholics, the Puritans rallied behind her to quell their common enemy. Despite her vanity and her assertion that she was God's anointed Prince and therefore placed upon the throne by Divine providence, she never completely alienated those conscientious Puritans who would have refused to serve a ruler who set herself up as the absolute of ecclesiastical matters, for she came short of claiming spiritual sovereignty over her subjects. More importantly, she succeeded in inspiring from all her subjects, regardless of their theological leanings, love and admiration as the benevolent guide and symbol of their country and its achievements. Through her wise management of economic affairs, the middle class flourished and prospered, and since this was the stronghold of the Puritans, she was loved more by

this powerful and politically active party than most of her religious policies were hated.

Furthermore, most Puritans supported the status quo, for they were a sober, industrious sort who believed strongly in supporting and obeying government and its laws. Many became respectable, even wealthy members of society, and because of their dedication to the work ethic, they became the backbone of England's solid economy. But in 1558, one faction of the Separatist Puritan party (Puritans who left the orthodox Church and set up independent congregations) exploded in the "Martin Marprelate" controversy when it published a number of vicious tracts attacking the established Church and dispersed them all over London. These called Archbishop Lambeth "a monstrous antichrist," and they slandered the Clergy, bishops, and all converts within the Church as well. Parliament reacted quickly, putting one of the authors to death, and banishing and imprisoning others. Many dissidents left the country, and the Separatist malcontents were quiet for a while.⁹

Still, Elizabeth could not rest easy. She feared and mistrusted the Puritan party, particularly that wing of the Separatist group which had been responsible for the Martin Marprelate tracts. And other, even more radical factions resided in London which she considered a dangerous

threat to the Church, State, and Crown. These were small groups of Anabaptists,¹⁰ and although they were in no way associated with the Puritan movement, many Elizabethans believed they were. Anglicans, Catholics, and Puritans alike feared and hated these various sects, scattered throughout London; they considered them dangerous heretics who threatened their government and their religion. Generally, Anabaptist congregations were made up of highly moral, politically inactive, humble folk who simply wanted to live exactly as Christ and His disciples had. They defended their loyalty to Crown and country, but their history and doctrine provoked suspicion.

The Anabaptists were extremely democratic, even communistic. Many groups lived communally, and even the most conservative of them elected their own officials. They refused to take any oaths, to fight in the military, to go to the law, or, for that matter, respect any government law whatsoever. Because they believed that governments were "ordained because of sin," they forswore any allegiance to the state, and because they believed that the world could not be Christianized, they separated themselves from it, sometimes even going into voluntary exile.¹¹ Such a set of doctrines and practices was threatening to all established government, for basically they were preaching not only

communism, but also absolute spiritual and political anarchy. To the English society based upon the class system, the Anabaptists represented the possible destruction of the entire fabric of the English way of life.¹² Because they were pacifistic, they might not have been considered such a threat had they not shown themselves capable of effective, cooperative rebellion.

The movement, which had existed on the fringes of legal religion for the past several centuries, began to gain momentum when a well-organized group of believers appeared in Switzerland in 1522. Zwingli¹³ drove them out of the country because he found them too radical, and they scattered throughout Europe, merging and growing with other groups with similar ideas. Although reviled and persecuted wherever they went, they usually reacted with passive restraint, accepting their hardships meekly. However, in 1529, a small group in the German province of Westphalia, seized the town of Munster, fortified it, and turned it into a "New Jerusalem." There they practiced communistic Christianity and reinstated the Old Testament form of polygamy. The leaders consisted of uneducated peasants and craftsmen, yet they managed to set up a highly disciplined, complex theocracy. Not until more than a year later did the Church's soldiers manage to

recapture the town, execute the leaders, and drive the other rebels out of the country.¹⁴ This incredible event in the history of the Reformation further vitiated the Anabaptist movement in the eyes of governments and Churches all over Europe and Great Britian, and leaders of every country became doubly anxious to eradicate any branches of the movement whenever they sprang up.

A group surfaced in England prior to 1575, and Elizabeth, aware that Scotland, France, and Spain stood ready to invade England should it ever prove vulnerable, was determined to eliminate any sect that might initiate any form of rebellion. The queen, santioned by every element of government and Church, began an exhaustive campaign to rid England of these religious extremists. Many were exiled; others remained and withstood the persecution. Even though many were captured, tortured, and executed, they did not stop worshipping the way they believed. In the beginning, the Puritans reviled the Anabaptists as much as the government did. Not only did their heretical philosophy threaten their established government and way of life, but their abominable reputation tarnished the whole Reform movement. Additionally, the multiplication of religious sects in general led some people to doubt, even deny, all forms of Christianity and religion. However, later in the

seventeenth century, as more and more Anabaptists showed courage and dignity in the face of torture and martyrdom, many Protestants began to sympathize with them and eventually to adopt some of their principles.

As the end of Elizabeth's reign neared, religious controversy within the nation diminished somewhat, primarily because the members of most factions realized they could not persuade the aging queen to make changes in the Church she had molded. Nevertheless, the Reform movement was splintered, polarized by extreme viewpoints on all sides. Disharmony waited for an opportunity to erupt, and it came when James I ascended the throne in 1603. Determined to make the new sovereign see the Truth according to their various doctrines, the different factions became more and more vocal in their insistence that the Church of England do things their way. James had inherited Elizabeth's Catholic problems, and because he lacked her diplomacy and ability to identify with his subjects, he also alienated the middle class and moderate Puritans almost from the onset of his reign. The twenty-two years that he ruled helped to set the stage for the rebellion and civil war that his son, Charles I, paid for with his life.

James, like the preceding sovereigns, began his reign hoping to reconcile all the religious factions which were

fragmenting the unity of the country. Although Mary Stuart's son, he was reared apart from her and under the influence of Presbyterian clergymen; consequently, most Protestants believed he would at long last bring England toward a complete reformation of the Christian Church. But James proved to be no Puritan, and despite his Protestant upbringing, he became less tolerant of the Reform party than Elizabeth had been. In 1604, he held the Hampton Court Conference, ostensibly to recognize the Puritans and hear out their grievances, but once he gathered them together, he ridiculed their presbyterian ideas. "If you aim at a Scottish presbytery," he said, "It agreeth as well with monarchy as God and the devil." And he warned them to conform to the Anglican Articles or he would "harry them out of the land."¹⁵

One of James' most controversial contributions to England was his autocratic royalist doctrine and his carrying the idea of the divine right of kings to the extreme. The divine right doctrine, which supported hereditary rights of monarchs by claiming that kings were annointed by God to be His lieutenants on earth, had been a part of the Tudor tradition, and Elizabeth, too, had espoused the theory. But James' ideas, based upon French and Scottish royalist principles, were more extreme and less acceptable to a nation which had grown up under the protection of the Magna Carta. While Elizabeth had acted as imperiously as any absolute

monarch, and had generally managed to bend Parliament to her will, in theory she held a less autocratic doctrine, that of "mixed monarchy," where the Prince and Parliament (which theoretically reflected the will of the people) ruled jointly. Further, Elizabeth did not claim to be the supreme head of the Church, as her father had. She simply styled herself the head of the nation, a "limited" monarch who governed by law rather than her will. In reality, Elizabeth was one of the most autocratic monarchs England has known, but as long as she allowed her people to believe she espoused a constitutional monarchy, they were content to leave her to her prerogatives.¹⁶

James, however, went a step further in his royalist doctrine and became more openly insistent in autocratic rights. He made it clear in his first address to Parliament in March, 1603, that he intended to claim absolute sovereignty over England, and in 1609, he reaffirmed to Parliament:

The State of Monarchie is the supremest thing vpon earth: For Kings are not onely GODS Lieutenants vpon the earth, and sit upon GODS throne, but even by GOD himselfe they are called gods. . . . Iudges over all their subiects, and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God onely. They have power to exalt low things, and abase high things, and make of their subiects like men at the Chesse: A pawne to take a Bishop or a Knight, and to cry vp, or downe any of their subiects, as they do their money. And to the King is due both the affection of the soul, and the service of the body of his subiects.¹⁷

In direct opposition to the theory that many of his subjects held concerning their right to dethrone a tyrannical ruler, he maintained that the common people have no justification for rebelling, even against wicked princes, because despots are sent by God as a scourge to discipline a sinful nation. The people have no recourse but to endure their hardships and wait for God to punish such a tyrant.

James' doctrine made his religion essentially political rather than spiritual. He was dogmatic about this one issue and about the episcopalian form of government, and although he did not overly concern himself about whether or not people attended church services, he was not inclined to allow any deviation from the Anglican doctrines which he incorporated into the service and dogma. Any opposition to his Church was legally punishable as sedition in the courts. It is understandable why he was so defensive about his own faith, for it alone accommodated his autocratic theories. The country was becoming more and more fragmented by uncontrollable religious dissent, and he feared any religious doctrine that taught that the king was no divinity, but a fallible human being. James' sovereignty, even his very life, hinged upon his subjects' acceptance of the divine right of kings and the sacredness of their power.

The Catholics did not believe that a monarch was placed

over England by God's divine providence; the bull in 1570 which deposed Elizabeth and the subsequent attacks on her life affirmed that idea. Politically weak and more desperate than the Calvinists, they believed themselves forced to use extreme measures to rid England of such an heretical prince. In 1605, a group of Catholics attempted to blow up Parliament while James, the royal family, and all of Parliament were assembled there. Some of the conspirators were caught red-handed with huge amounts of gunpowder in the Parliament basement. All those associated with the conspiracy were promptly tried and executed, and Guy Fawkes Day (named after one of the plotters) became a national holiday, annually reminding the English of their hatred for the Spanish and the Catholics. Parliament, already looking for excuses to persecute Catholics, redoubled their efforts to ferret out Catholicism in England, but since James wanted peace and preferred hierarchal Catholicism over democratic Puritanism, he maintained a tolerant attitude toward Catholics and strove for an alliance with Spain.

Despite the violence of the radical Catholics, it was the Puritans who came to be James' most dangerous enemies. Of Scottish, not British origin, James' autocratic theories were not acceptable to many British subjects, particularly the Puritans. They simply could not stomach the idolatry

of calling the king a "god." Many otherwise content members of the Anglican Church had begun to absorb democratic ideas from the many religious and political theories which were circulating around England and Europe, and they were uneasy with the undemocratic direction James was leading their religion. Members of the middle and lower classes especially found themselves siding with the Separatists and other Reform groups against his claims, and many left the Anglican Church to worship with them.

It is evident that the conflicts James encountered and aggravated stemmed from as much social as religious discord. The rigid class system which had been the backbone of all English society for centuries began crumbling when England entered the Renaissance period. It had always been assumed that the nobility were the natural rulers of the state because they were inherently superior in intellect and judgement to commoners and peasants. This assumption was easily perpetrated as long as rigid class distinctions were maintained and as long as the upper classes possessed the lion's share of the money and controlled the government. But as middle-class merchants became wealthy enough to buy their own baronies and noblemen were reduced to poverty because of the changing economic system, the justification of a privileged class eroded. A kind of social war between

nobility and the lower and middle classes sprang up and intensified during the years of James' reign. The aristocrats sided with the king in most ecclesiastical and political matters, supporting his divine right doctrine and making a pointed attempt to remain aloof from even the wealthiest members of the middle class. At the same time, merchants all over London were making fortunes through their hard work and intelligent investments, and they became anxious to buy the country estates, titles, and privileges that had at one time been reserved for only those coming from the right bloodlines. The country's economy was changing its base from land to ready money, and landed gentry, finding themselves impoverished, were often forced to borrow from merchants and to sell them the estates which had been in their families for generations.

While the merchant classes embraced the pragmatic, reformed doctrines which emphasized the work ethic and the spiritual equality of all men, the nobility were clinging to the older traditions which had been a way of life for centuries and which allowed them their elitist view of the world around them. Most of them still adhered to the rigid code of honor which had originated as a moral and religious code during the knights' campaigns of the Middle Ages. It had started out as a standard based upon Christian faith and its defense,

but as time passed and the gentry and nobility which perpetrated it changed their ideals, the code changed as well. By the time of the Renaissance, it had incorporated more Aristotelian and Platonic than Christian standards of behavior. Those who lived by it clung to it as one of the only distinctions they had to show themselves superior to the vulgar, albeit wealthy, tradespeople. They came to believe that it represented a higher and finer law than the temporal and religious laws which served the masses, and as a result, they began to deify the code itself rather than the God it had originally meant to serve. These attitudes naturally caused an even greater breach in spirit between the upper and the middle and lower classes, and it represented the esoteric attitude and the scorn for the multitudes that the king himself held. It is no wonder that the personal, political, and religious philosophies of James and his court alienated the majority of his subjects.

Much of James' domestic and foreign policy was influenced by his favorite, the dashing, aristocratic George Villiers. James made him Earl, then Marquis, then the Duke of Buckingham, and after 1616, allowed him to direct the policies of state. Buckingham's wife, Lady Katherine Manners, was Catholic, and she may have influenced Buckingham and James to pursue a national policy favorable to Catholics at

home and abroad. Whatever the reason, James kept the peace with Spain, despite the urgings of Commons to enter the Thirty Years' War on behalf of Bohemian and German Protestants. Commons also importuned him to seek an alliance with a Protestant country through the marriage of his children, but James, at the urging of Buckingham, steered a different course. First he tried to marry his elder son, Henry, to the Spanish Infanta, but Henry died in 1612, before the wedding. He next arranged for a marriage between his daughter and Philip III of Spain, but this failed to materialize, and she eventually married the Lutheran Elector Palatinate Frederick. The people rejoiced, but not for long, for James and Buckingham then negotiated a match between James' sole surviving son, Charles, and Maria, Philip IV's sister. The final attempt at an alliance with Spain angered and alienated James' subjects and Parliament, and Archbishop Abbot, an ardent Calvinist, angrily protested on behalf of all the anti-Catholics in the country. James fired Abbot, replacing him with the anti-Puritan Bancroft, and he put the Puritans in their place by excluding them from court preferments and declaring that no one under the rank of bishop could preach on predestination or election.

Parliament also reacted to the marriage proposal, condemning James' relaxation of the anti-Catholic laws,

and urging him to end all Catholic toleration. In 1618, James further enraged all of Britian by executing a beloved national hero, Sir Walter Raleigh, for plundering a Spanish colony in Guiana. Although Raleigh insisted he was innocent, James' patience with him was already worn thin because he had been implicated in plots against the king several years before, so when the Spanish Ambassador, the Count of Gondomar, demanded Raleigh's blood, James spilled it.

By 1621, the rift between the king and Parliament was wider than it had ever been before, and the Commons, made up primarily of middle-class Puritans, naturally were beginning to balk at the idea of a limitless royal power over their money. They hated the lavish, "decadent" lifestyle of James and his courtiers. James, extravagant, prissy, supercilious, and pacific, irritated the democratic, bellicose Commons. In a show of defiance, it denounced James' lavish lifestyle and his infamous granting of monopolies to court sycophants. When James chastized them for meddling in court affairs, they issued the historic "Great Protestation," which asserted the rights and the privileges of the Institution of Parliament. They claimed, "The arduous and urgent affairs of king, state and defense . . . are proper subjects and matter of council and debate in Parliament,"¹⁸ Furious, James ripped the page containing this assertion from the journal of the

Parliament (Feb. 8, 1622), ordered the imprisonment of four Parliamentary rulers, and defiantly sent Charles and Buckingham to Spain to see the Infanta and conclude the match. The whole nation was alarmed. Ministers reacted so violently from their pulpits that James was forced to order the clergy not to denigrate the marriage in the churches.

The wedding never materialized. In the premarital negotiations, Philip refused to grant even small concessions to England, but made excessive demands upon James and Charles. James finally ordered the Prince and the Duke home, and England rejoiced as hysterically as it had when the royal navy had defeated the Armada. To the British who had been bred upon hatred for Catholic Spain for generations, the thought of a Spaniard becoming their queen was anathema.

It is not surprising, in the light of these events, that anti-Spanish propaganda, particularly satire, was relished by the English people. Thomas Middleton's play, A Game of Chess, which satirized the Spanish marriage negotiations caricatured many important Spaniards residing in England, was an enormous popular success. Audiences particularly delighted in the caricature of the Count of Gondomar, the same ambassador who had importuned James to execute Sir Walter Raleigh. Not amused, the Count persuaded James to order the arrest of the playwright.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Buckingham, embarrassed over his failure to negotiate concessions from Philip, secured a marital alliance with France and negotiated a new marriage between Charles and the youngest daughter of Henry V, Henrietta Maria, another Catholic. Then he maligned Spain to the now aging and failing James and persuaded him to declare war. Parliament reassembled in February of 1624 and voted to conscript men and money for the fight. But what they appropriated was not enough, and James' subjects blamed him for the subsequent failure of the British forces.

James died the next year, misunderstood by and misunderstanding most of his subjects. He had high ideals for himself, but his pomposity and his poorly-chosen favorites helped to destroy, not only him, but his Church and his particular form of government as well. By the time of his death, Middleton's pen had been put to rest, and in 1627, the playwright died. The Reformation did not pause to mourn either of them.

ENDNOTES
CHAPTER ONE

1

Although many scholars cite 1570 as the date of Middleton's birth, 1580 seems more likely. If he had been born during the earlier year, he would have been thirty two years old before he wrote his first plays, Caesar's Fall and The Family of Love. See Gerald Eades Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 856.

2

Will Durant, The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wycliff to Calvin: 1300-1564 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), pp. 592-9; William Clark, The Anglican Reformation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), pp. 198-245.

3

Clark, p. 245.

4

Charles Howard McIlwain, Introduction to The Political Works of James I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), pp. xvii-xxii.

5

Harold J. Grimm, The Reformation Era: 1500-1650 (New York: McMillan Company, 1954), p. 470ff; Kerby Neill, "The Faerie Queen and the Mary Stuart Controversy," Journal of English Literary History, 2 (1935), 193ff; McIlwain. p. xxvi.

6

Clark, p. 314.

7

Will Durant and Ariel Durant, The Age of Reason Begins (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 17.

8

Arminianism was founded by James Arminius, a one-time disciple of Calvin who later came to doubt some Calvinistic principles. Arminius' doctrines were altered by his followers, and the basic premises became more divorced from Calvinism. The precepts assert that salvation is possible to all, not just the elect, and that human will and morals are an important element of salvation. It also maintains that it is possible to fall from grace.

9

Clark, pp. 336-9.

10

The term "Anabaptist" comes from the Greek meaning "baptized again." Most members joined Anabaptist congregations as adults, and since they had already been christened into the orthodox Church as infants, they were rebaptized into their new faith. They did not, however, believe in infant baptism at all. See Grimm, pp. 266-7; Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 99.

11

Roland H. Bainton, Studies on the Reformation, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 99.

12

Buckley, p. 45.

13

Zwingli, a Reform leader with ideas similar to Calvin's, believed in predestination, salvation through grace, simple, Biblical sermons, and that sacraments were merely symbols of grace, not the means by which grace is dispensed.

14

W.J. M'Glothlin, "Anabaptism," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 411.

15

T.H. Breen, The Character of a Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1603-1730 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 17; Knappen, p. 317; Bertil Johansson, Religion and Superstition in the Plays of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton, vol. VII of Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, ed. S.B. Liljegren (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 47.

16

G.R. Elton, England Under the Tudors (London: Methuen and Co., 1974), pp. 400-3.

17

James I, Political Works, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), p. 307-8.

18

Durant, The Age of Reason Begins, pp. 156-9; Grimm, p. 548; Heinemann, p. 48; Clark, pp. 388-9.

19

It is uncertain if Middleton was actually arrested or spent any time in jail for his offense. Tradition has it that he wrote a poem to the king which secured his release. See Richard Hindry Barker, Thomas Middleton (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), p. 23.

CHAPTER TWO

HYPOCRITES AND HERETICS:

Middleton's Comic Treatment of Calvinists and Anabaptists

The preceding chapter points out that religious issues contributed as fundamentally to the political and social as to the moral and spiritual facets of the British temper; they played a considerable part in shaping the nature of England during the fifteenth century. During this time the nation had seen religious sects spring up like yellowtop in the spiritually fecund climate of the Reformation, and a myriad of new, untried ideals blossomed from even the roots of these movements. Unlike their forebears who were exposed to only the one metaphysical possibility offered by the medieval Church, the Elizabethans confronted a large variety of choices, and these choices served not only to enlighten and educate, but also to provoke dissension over a multitude of religious, political, and social issues.

Thomas Middleton, like many literary men of the age, found a rich source of material in the resolutions and conflicts, both internal and external, within this variety of thought. While Catholics, Anglicans, and

Sectaries hotly debated spiritual "realities" from pulpit and press and gallants enmeshed themselves in the complexities of the chivalric and Petrarchan codes, writers were probing into the labyrinth of human responses to spiritual issues and taking advantage of the literary possibilities they found there. In his comedies, Middleton often held up to ridicule the foibles of hypocrites and heretics who used religion to justify unacceptable behavior. In the tragedies, he showed how those who reject "true" religion in favor of false gods are damned for their heresies.

The only son of a prosperous bricklayer, Middleton was baptized in the Anglican Church in 1580. He attended Oxford as a young man, and at the age of seventeen, launched his literary career with a series of pious and moral pamphlets, tracts, and poems. The first, a religious tract entitled The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphased,¹ was followed by Microcynicon and Six Snarling Satires in 1599. His first plays, Caesar's Fall, now lost, and The Family of Love were produced in 1602. He returned to religious and moral tracts in 1604 with Father Hubbard's Tales, or The Ant and The Nightingale and The Black Book. All of these moral works reflect orthodox Church philosophy and doctrines current during the late

Elizabethan age.

Sometime prior to 1604, Middleton married Mary Marbeck, a woman whose family leaned decidedly toward Calvinism. Her paternal grandfather, John Marbeck, a well-known organist at St. George Chapel, was so vocal in his protestant attitude that in 1544, during the reign of Mary Tudor, he was tried for heretical views and sentenced to the stake. Fortunately, his musical talents won him a pardon from the Catholic queen and thus saved him from a martyr's death.

Middleton himself maintained his relatively orthodox religious philosophy long into his literary career. As a member of the official Church of England, he accepted many Calvinist doctrines, as did most Anglicans during that time. Despite Queen Elizabeth's indifference to genuine spirituality and her love for Church ritual, in the interest of good politics and national unity she allowed the Reform movement to grow and flourish as much as her distaste for a democratic and unadorned religion would allow. With the adoption of the Revised Prayer Book and the Act of Uniformity of 1559, the Church had embraced certain Calvinistic theological principles, but it had stopped short of total reform according to the Genevan model. At Elizabeth's insistence, Parliament

and most Church officials agreed to maintain the episcopalian governing structure, some watered-down rituals and ceremonies which had been used during the celebration of the Catholic mass, and the requiring of clergy to wear official vestments, even when they were not performing clerical duties. Many Church members and officials denounced these "relics of popery" and either refused to participate in what they considered more grievous offences, or they accepted the conditions but lobbied for their eventual discontinuance. This was the beginning of a fledgling Puritan faction, but it was not until 1564 that the term "Puritan" was first applied to this dissenting element of the orthodox Church.² The party was originally made up of members who urged the Church to divest itself of all "popish remnants both in ceremonies and regiment," but it gained rapid momentum when it began to call for better education of ministers, an ideal to which, to her discredit, Elizabeth did not aspire.³

Despite the fact that many of Elizabeth's most important churchmen and leading statesmen preferred that the Church adopt most of the reforms the Puritans urged,⁴ the issues became tainted with politics. In order to keep the peace with Elizabeth, most Church officials sided with her, even beginning a campaign of active

repression against the Puritan faction. This in turn caused moderate popular opinion to turn against Puritans in general, and the political implications behind the relatively sane and practical Puritan platform made the difference between High, or conservative Anglicans and Puritan Anglicans seem much greater than they actually were. In reality, there was little difference in basic religious ideology, and most of the Puritan faction was content to remain in the Church, some holding high offices there, even as they lobbied for greater reform.

But the rift grew deeper, particularly as the Puritans became more preoccupied with superficial differences. Since Puritans were out of favor, those who remained dedicated to their cause naturally spent a greater portion of their lives devoted to it, becoming more conscientious about living their religion, turning to spiritual solace more frequently and placing more emphasis upon the godly than the worldly. Intensely preoccupied with moral issues, they became more sober, devout, and more like the Jean Calvin who had bequeathed them their religious legacy.

A small number of them, perhaps no more than a thousand at any one time, still agreeing with the Puritan Anglicans in almost all matters, but rightly believing

that Elizabeth's Church would never be freed from popish influences, simply divorced themselves from the official Church altogether and set up separate congregations of their own with a presbyterian form of governing body.⁵ Their worship services differed in form more than content. Not being a part of the established subsidized Church, most of their services were held in private homes, and their clergy were unsalaried, subsisting upon irregular offerings from the oftentimes poor congregations. The fact that they could not afford costly vestments, stained-glass windows, altar cloths, candelabra and organs did not bother them; they considered such trappings idolatrous and were content with their plain psalm-singing and Bible study.

Although most were upright citizens, loyal to the crown on almost all issues, these Separatist Puritans were regarded with great antipathy and fear by all of the orthodox Church, even its Puritan members, who considered them an embarrassment to their cause and a threat to it and to the government. Indeed, they were largely responsible for widening the breach between the High Anglicans and the Puritans, because they alienated the conservatives and eventually helped to destroy the moderate Puritan cause. Their presbyterian ideas rankled

the crown and Church officials, and when the Martin Mar-prelate pamphlets libeling Church officials sprang up, the force of the entire government exploded upon them. Faced with intense persecution from Church, government, and populace, many went underground and fragmented into smaller, more radical sects. One of the most left-wing of these groups was the Brownists, or Barrowists.

Thomas Middleton's stepfather, Harvey, whom Middleton despised, was a member of this congregation, and no doubt the playwright became familiar with some Separatist practices during the brief time Harvey was associated with his family.⁶ Eventually, most of the Separatists were hounded out of the country; some sailed to America to become our pilgrim fathers and mothers. Although they had been small in number, the ardor of their religious zeal was instrumental in further polarizing the opposing Anglican parties and intensifying the distrust of Puritans in general.

Another important conflict which further divided Puritans and High Anglicans and vitiated the Puritans' public image was the issue of charity and its distribution. The medieval Church had more or less taken care of the poor through almshouses, convents, and monasteries, and after these Catholic institutions had been dissolved,

the Anglican Church's policy had continued along these lines, with accommodations for the poor through almshouses of its own and of the various congregations of parish churches. Citizens also were encouraged to give aid to the poor, and early zealous Calvinists were among the first to preach charity to the needy. However, two things abrogated the image of the generous Puritan. First, the Elizabethan economic climate began to change, favoring trade and craftsmanship, and the concentration of wealth began to shift from the pockets of the landed gentry to those of the bourgeois, the stronghold of the Puritan element. Simultaneously, the Elizabethan middle-class Puritans became convinced that it was a religious duty to commit themselves to the work ethic. Their concentrations centered on little other than work and spiritual concerns, and because they were thrifty as well as industrious, spurning sumptuous clothing and baubles, they soon found themselves wealthy. When they looked at the poor, they began to see, not the desperate needy, but a large number of idle people not obeying God's instruction to work diligently at a given calling. Although Puritans generally continued their generosity toward those who they believed really needed and deserved charity, particularly if they professed themselves of

the same religious bent, they became downright stingy when it came to alms for able-bodied men simply out of work. Those who did not agree with this philosophy, particularly the gentry who were bred with a different social and economic outlook, regarded the thrifty and properous Puritan with contempt. Angered also by the fact that old and respected families were becoming impoverished while the bourgeois grew wealthy, they began to assume that Puritans were a niggardly lot who hoarded their wealth and guarded it jealously.

In time, those unfamiliar with Church politics and those who did not understand the Puritan mentality began to confuse the various types of Puritans and to assign certain superficial traits to all those who displayed any Puritan tendencies, regardless of the political or religious convictions they maintained. Soon the wider term of "Puritan" became applied to all those who attempted a more sober, devout lifestyle, who tended to shun frivolity and secular amusements in favor of industry or devotion, and who dressed more severely than the average citizen. And more malicious people, those who shared an intense dislike of the Puritan party, whether Separatist or orthodox, and those who cynically believed that a pious exterior simply masked greed or lust,

associated Puritanism with hypocrisy. By the end of the sixteenth century, "Puritan" and "hypocrite" were synonymous to much of the London citizenry. In the course of half a century, what had begun as an ecclesiastical ideal had become a matter of politics, economics, appearances, and caricature.

Yet, the Puritans still were considered a viable and important force in Elizabethan and Jacobean society. Patriotic, industrious, and generally orthodox in their basic beliefs, they contributed much to the daily lives and comforts of every London citizen. Had religion in sixteenth and early seventeenth century England been confined merely to High Anglicans, Puritan Anglicans, and Separatist Puritans, the religious conflicts would have been, on the surface at least, far less of a problem to the government. As things stood, however, other elements served to fragment the population even more, cloud the more important political issues, and alarm the controlling officials of the established Church.

While Puritanism eventually became the most dangerous enemy to the crown, another religious party, distinctly different from Puritanism, seemed far more threatening to the orthodox view and to the English way of life during the Elizabethan period. This party, loosely known as

Anabaptist, had ancient roots, but it gained strength on the fringes of the Reform and Humanist movements. Although its principles were radically different, almost antithetical to the Calvinist doctrine in ideology, its adherents were sometimes confused with the Puritans because they also practiced a strict, simple morality, dressed soberly, and adopted a type of Biblical jargon that became associated with devout "Puritans" of all denominations.

But the Anabaptist movement was not an offshoot of Puritanism. Their roots can be found deep in the early medieval period with the mysticism of the Beghards and Begines. Later leaders came from mystical offshoots of the Roman Catholic Church as well. And although some Anabaptists at one point had associated themselves with Zwingli, they so completely broke with his doctrine that there was little left of the Zwinglian philosophy by the time various groups began surfacing in England during the mid-sixteenth century.

As noted in Chapter One, these Anabaptists, broken up into several diverse sects, were despised and persecuted by Puritans and High Anglicans alike because their views were so unconventional and because their attitudes toward government and civic welfare were antithetical

to the very basis of all European governmental structures. And, of course, the horrors of the Munster rebellion⁷ lingered in the minds of all government and ecclesiastical leaders. While most of these people, devout and benign, wanted only to worship their own way in peace and freedom, a very small number assumed ideals and practices which were offensive to the moral and political sensibilities of the times. Some sects denied the divinity of Christ, the concept of a physical heaven or hell, and the literal truth of the Scriptures. Others believed in interpreting the Bible absolutely literally and tried to live exactly as the early Christians had and as Christ had taught. Although many ideals of the different sects varied widely, all Anabaptists shared a common belief that they should disassociate themselves from government and society and live and worship only as the Spirit and their own individual consciences impelled them.

One Anabaptist offshoot, far removed from the main-spring of the Reform movement, and particularly odious to the orthodox English Christian, was the notorious "Family of Love," or "House of Love," which flourished among the ignorant and poor during Elizabeth's reign. One of the most mystical of the Anabaptist sects, it was established by David Gorg of Delft and Basel and

found a congenial home in England when Gorg's disciple, H. Nichales, visited there in 1552 or 1553. Nichales organized and clarified Gorg's basic ideas and spread them throughout Europe and into England. At least fifteen of his works were translated into English, and soon after, an alarming number of converts began to swell their congregations. They grew, undaunted and unchecked, despite royal proclamations, civil persecution, and even an official Parliamentary attempt to suppress them.⁸

Nichales' writings are so vague that it is difficult to understand his theological principles, but apparently his English followers adopted some outrageous ideas and practices. According to an account in 1575 by one Strype, they

denied Christ, the Trinity, and the Lord's Prayer . . . they were libertines, and laid with one another's wives . . . they accounted whoredom, murder, poisoning, etc., to be no sin . . . they denied the resurrection of the flesh and the immortality of the soul. . . .⁹

Although nothing in Nichales' writings verifies these accusations, one Anglican minister, Anthony Randall, who was caught and tried for attending Familist services, apparently admitted to heresies particularly odious to orthodox beliefs.¹⁰ Also, according to many accounts,

these sectaries carried the ideal of divine love to perverted extremes, engaging in sexual orgies to "edify" their "spirit of love." Further, they, and particularly the elders, were charged with antinomianism, with believing that God incarnate dwelt within them and gave them a holiness which rendered them sinless in both thought and deed.¹¹ Moreover, since they claimed spiritual superiority over all non-Familists, they considered it justifiable to lie and dissemble about their activities in order to avoid persecution and ridicule.

The Familists were still active during James' reign; in 1606 they petitioned the king for toleration, but the appeal was summarily rejected. Eventually, after a century or more of general persecution by government, clergy, and populace, they modified their doctrines and merged into the later Quaker movement. Because the Puritans had made the error of specifically attacking stage plays for their immorality; because their pious attitudes, plain clothing, and alien jargon were so easily caricatured; because there were so many reform sects espousing unorthodox and unpopular doctrines and practices; and because it was so acceptable to accuse them of greed, hypocrisy, and licentiousness, the far left branch of the Reform movement became a particu-

larly favorite target for playwrights. The image they created for the pious brethren still lives today, and even those moderns who have never seen or read a Jacobean play are familiar with the dour "Puritan," long of face and of wind, but short of morality and sincerity.

As critic Margot Heinemann has illustrated, Middleton was amicable with the moderate Puritans who governed London. He was commissioned to write seven Lord Mayor's pageants and a number of city entertainments. In 1620, he became the City Chronologer, serving in that position until his death in 1627.¹² Several Puritan businessmen even served as his patrons from time to time. Undoubtedly he had been exposed to the opinions of his Brownist stepfather and to his wife's Puritan family, so he must have understood at least the superficial differences between Anglican Puritans, Separatist Puritans, and Sectaries. Yet, during most of his writing career, he rarely bothered to make the distinctions clear. He easily could have called the unorthodox Puritans Independents, Brownists, Barrowists, Levelers, or a number of other names associated with the Separatist movement, but he did not. Clearly, in the light of the number of satires he wrote against them, he had no compulsion against calling Puritans religious "deviants" and enjoyed exposing the heresies

and hypocrisies that he, and much of London, believed were inherent in their unorthodox opinions. He also satirized many other current religious movements, except orthodox Anglicanism, perhaps even beginning his play-writing career with an attack on the disreputable Familist sect in The Family of Love (1602)

THE FAMILY OF LOVE:

Anabaptist Heretics

Although The Family of Love apparently proved popular during its initial production (the author says "it passed the censure of the stage with general applause"),¹³ it has not fared well with the critics during the past several generations. George Buckley called it a "poor piece of hack work,"¹⁴ and Swinburne denounced it as "unquestionably and incomparably the worst of Middleton's plays: very coarse, very dull, altogether distasteful and ineffectual."¹⁵ To the modern reader the play may seem naively sexual and scatological in its humor, yet, for such an early effort (Middleton was only 22), it is surprisingly well wrought. As Richard Levin points

out, it boasts intricately related plots which comment upon and reinforce one another to make a profound statement about the nature of love and lust.¹⁶

The Familist plot concerns the heresies peculiar to members of the Family of Love sect. Despite many critics' assertions to the contrary, the play is not a satire against Puritans in general.¹⁷ Like many of his contemporaries, Middleton may have confused superficial tendencies between Puritans and some Anabaptist groups, but in The Family of Love he attacked characteristics specifically attributed to the members of that sect. He did not associate the word "Puritan" with any of the Family members, nor did he assign any Puritan ideologies to them.

The "heroine" of this plot is Rebecca Purge, an elder in The Family of Love who is guilty of many of the spectacular crimes of which Elizabethan London accused Familists. She is very "devout," but her religion is quite unorthodox; she and her fellow Familists "worship" at orgies rather than at traditional prayer services. Middleton utilized the popular rumors concerning Familists' carnality in several of his plays. In A Mad World, My Masters (1604-6), the stupid cuckold Harebrain, with ignorant irony praises the courtesan Frank Gullman for

her chastity, calling her "a good wholesome sister of the Family," (I,ii,73-4) and Knaves-bee in Anything for a Quiet Life (1621), is so anxious to curry favor with Lord Beaufort that he tries to persuade his wife to sleep with him. "Some Familists of Amsterdam will tell you it may be done with a safe conscience," he tells her, hoping to weaken her scruples (I,i,97-8). Mistress Purge of The Family of Love, however, is more flagrant with her philandering: "We fructify best i' th' dark," (III,iii,21) she says on her way from her paramour's bed and to yet another Familist debauchery at one of the brothers' houses.

Because they were constantly hunted and persecuted by government officials, Elizabethan Familists often required a password for admission into their services. In 1561, one member confessed to authorities that those who would worship with his congregation must announce at the door: "Here is a Brother in Christ, or a sister in Christe."¹⁸ Middleton also gave his Familists a secret phrase: "A brother [or sister] in the Family" opens the door to their late-night orgies. There are perhaps two reasons why Middleton chose to make the password differ from the one elicited in the 1561 confession: one is organic to the action of the play, the other to

Middleton's reaction to religious influences.

When Purge overhears his wife's conversation with Dryfat, who wishes to join the Family of Love, he, in a fit of well-warranted jealousy, attempts to attend a meeting in order to find out exactly what goes on there. At the door he announces himself as "a familiar brother," making an unconscious pun which not only debars him from the services, but also accents the fact that the Familists, along with everyone else in the play, want to become sexually familiar with one another. Another reason Middleton may have altered the password is in order to disassociate Christian overtones from the rituals of such an heretical group of sectaries. While Calvinists stressed the strict and absolute reliance upon Christ for grace and atonement, Middleton's Familists speak, pervertedly, only of the inspiration which comes from physical "familiarity" with one another.

The doctrine of divine inspiration through the Spirit is an ancient one, based upon medieval Roman Catholic mysticism and also incorporated into Anabaptist ideology through their emphasis upon the workings of the Holy Spirit as found in the New Testament. The Familists seem to have stressed this doctrine, because they often were accused of neglecting scriptural study

and relying solely upon personal "divine revelation" from God. Since the devout Calvinists were concerned that ministers and lay church members alike become well educated and conversant with all the Scriptures, it would have seemed egregious to them to see a group which reveled in its own ignorance. The play's numerous references to meetings in the dark signify the Familists' preferring to keep out of the light of true knowledge. Dryfat, in relating his qualifications for becoming a member, tells Mistress Purge that he refuses to "follow the written verity," and Mistress Purge explains why members do not wish to "see: "The glance of the eye is a great matter; it leads us to other objects besides the right. . . . We hold it not amiss to put out the candles, for the soul sees best i' th' dark." (III,iii,22-4; 49-51)

But a love of ignorance and darkness is not the worst result of the Familists' reliance upon individual and "spiritual" inspiration. The doctrine of gifts and edification through the Spirit spoken of in Acts is so perverted that the brothers and sisters have come to confuse, and no doubt, substitute, the feeling of sexual pleasure for the religious euphoria the disciples experienced when they received the power of the Holy Spirit.

This inverts the orthodox Calvinistic belief that the flesh constantly battles the spirit for dominion over the will, a belief that Middleton obviously held, for he illustrated it time and again in later plays. Thus, while orthodox believers were constantly wary of the Devil's attempts to win souls by the seductive power of sensuality, the Familists were gleefully breaking the seventh commandment and giving thanks for the workings of the "Holy Spirit:"

Mistress Purge: Why then, a sense let it be,--I say it is that we cannot be with out it, for as I take it, it is a part belonging to understanding: understanding, you know, lifteth up the mind from earth: if the mind be lift up, you know, the body goes with it: also it descends into the conscience, and thus tickles us with our works and doings: so that we make singular use of feeling. . . . These senses, as you term them are of much efficacy in carnal mixtures; that is, when we crowd and thrust a man and a woman together. (III,iii, 41-7; 54-6)

To the orthodox Anglican, such a perversion of the doctrine of charity and divine inspiration could be the result of only two possibilities: either the Familists were arch-hypocrites who had no respect for the Scriptures and used them merely to cover their iniquities, or they were guilty of believing that they were on the same level with God Himself and therefore free to make up their own moral rules, which was a supreme heresy according to

orthodox religions of Middleton's age. The play accuses Familists of both crimes. Several characters point out the hypocrisy inherent in the Familist doctrine; Gerardine jokingly says he maintains the principles of a Familist:

"I never rail nor calumniate any man but in love and charity; I never cozen any man for any ill will I bear him, but in love and charity to myself; I never make my neighbor a cuckold for any hate or malice I bear him, but in love and charity to his wife." (IV,ii,71-5)

Lipsalve tells a sure way to pass as a Family member:

"Then speak pitifully, look scurvily, dissemble cunningly, and we shall quickly prove two of the Fraternity," and Purge calls them "a most Pharasit-hypocritical crew."

While hypocrisy may be laughed at as a human weakness, the crime of antinomianism cannot, for carried to its logical extremes, it could cause the collapse of the moral and civil order of the entire society. Rebecca Purge, an elder in Middleton's The Family of Love, clearly sees herself as a spiritually superior person, even though she is perhaps the most promiscuous woman to be found in Jacobean literature. The reader may interpret her pious words as simply another instance of hypocrisy, and she certainly acts the arch-hypocrite when she stands on trial for adultery. It was believed among

Elizabethans that Familists held it no sin to lie about their beliefs and activities so that they could hide the truth about their practices, and Mistress Purge accordingly lies during her trial. When confronted with the fact that her wedding ring is missing, she claims to have given it "to the relief of the distressed in Geneva," and then, when her husband testifies that he took it from her during a Familist orgy, she piously insists that she knew at the time it happened that the man who embraced her in the dark and took the ring was her own husband.

Yet, despite her impromptu and badly mangled prevarications, more than mere hypocrisy shines through some of Mistress Purge's speeches. As she defends herself and her religion, she seems sincerely convinced that her actions are sanctified. When Gerardine and Purge, her husband, admonish her to stop sleeping with the brethern and to cleave only to her spouse, she replies with directness: "Truly husband, my love must be free still to God's creatures: yea, nevertheless, preserving you still as the head of my body, I will do as the spirit shall enable me." (V,iii,425-8) Earlier in the play she clings to her belief in her spiritual superiority, becoming outraged at her servant Club when he suggests that he is her spiritual equal. She also obviously holds herself aloof

from Lipsalve and Gudgeon when they try to woo her. She has her standards; she is not merely a wanton ripe for all takers.

Because most Elizabethans were convinced that man, existing in the fallen state, could never achieve spiritual perfection, Mistress Purge's claims must have made her appear to Middleton's audiences not only a "loose-bodied hypocrite," but a dangerous heretic as well. To assert that The Family of Love is merely a crude satire against Puritans in general does both the play and Middleton a disservice. The playwright knew that the Familists were not connected to Puritanism. In this play he deliberately spoke out against heretical ideas which, if allowed to grow unchecked, might have threatened the very basis of religious, civil, and moral culture of the Elizabethan era.

THE PURITAN and A CHASTE MAID IN CHEAPSIDE:

A Blend of Anglican, Separatist, and Anabaptist Traits

The Family of Love is the only play in which Middleton concentrated his satire solely upon a particular sect. In his next two plays which satirize Reform groups, he mixed Anglican Puritan, Separatist Puritan, and Anabaptist practices, usually lumping the idiosyncrasies of each group together under the single label of "Puritan." The Puritan was first produced in 1606 and later published with the initials "W.S." on the title page, but critics agree that it does not sound like Shakespeare. Although Margot Heinemann refuses to believe that Middleton wrote it, asserting that it is "too crude for the period of Middleton it was written in,"¹⁹ nearly all other scholars agree that the case for Middleton's authorship "is overwhelmingly strong."²⁰ A copy in Middleton's handwriting exists, and other evidence, both internal and external, points directly to him. Perhaps Heinemann denies The Puritan to Middleton because, according to her, evidence within the play refutes her assertion that Middleton himself was a moderate Puritan during his entire adult life. She believes the play provides "the only case in which he used the word Puritan

in the sense of the Reforming party within the established Church, as distinct from separatists and sectaries; and he does not satirize such people elsewhere."²¹ Heinemann's assertion lacks support. Not only does the author satirize moderate Puritans in The Puritan, but also, as in the christening scene in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and in other plays, he mocks traits of the other reform groups, blithely assigning to Puritans the characteristics of other factions. The only play in which the moderate Puritan (in the pure sense) is satirized, with only a few Separatist traits included, is Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queensborough (1615-20), which Middleton most certainly wrote.

The action within The Puritan concerns a Puritan widow who mourns the loss of her husband so greatly that she proclaims she will never marry again. One daughter joins her in her pledge of chastity; the other, a bit of a wanton, vows to take a lover and a husband as soon as she can possibly lay her hands on one. The son dedicates himself to a life of leisure and debauchery, planning to spend his inheritance as rapidly as he is able. Two tricksters, George Pyeboard and a Captain (who spends the greater portion of the play in jail for non-payment of debts) concoct a plan to deceive the widow into

marrying the Captain and her chaste daughter, George, so that they may claim their fortunes. The plan is elaborate, complete with fortune telling and conjuration, and a fake duel with a "death" brought about by sleeping potion. The widow is easily gulled (as are all the victims in the play), but she and her daughter are rescued from marriage to the scoundrels at the very threshold of the church by two legitimate suitors who expose George and the Captain and end up becoming the bridegrooms themselves.

Although the complete title of the play is The Puritan Widow, the widow herself is not particularly endowed with puritanical traits. She briefly takes the time to malign tennis as a "wicked" and "vain" exercise, but her most obvious characteristics are not in the least associated with Puritanism. Her excessive grief over her dead husband and her vow not to remarry show more Augustinian Catholic than Puritan influences, for Calvinists believed that every man and woman should have a spouse to maintain the comfort of the soul and body and to avoid the sin of fornication. Idiotically superstitious, she readily believes George Pyeboard's outlandish claims, and she readily relinquishes her disbelief in purgatory when he demonstrates his fortune-telling

abilities. Apparently ignorant of all the Puritans' warnings against the devil, she also allows "Satanic" influences to rule her and her family's actions.

Sir Godfrey, her brother-in-law, exhibits a few popular "Puritan" traits: he displays an excessive concern with money and a complacent bourgeoisie pragmatism which preempts spirituality. His idea of comforting the grieving widow is to tell her that she is rich and pretty enough to find another husband to take the place of the old one, and while he cannot understand why his sister-in-law mourns so for his dead brother, he himself becomes nearly mad with grief until a gold chain which has been stolen from him has been returned. "It had full three thousand Lincks," he wails. "I have oft told it over at my Praiers: over and over, full three thousand Lincks."²² Since it is one of the most important things in Sir Godfrey's life, he finds no heresy too gross if it insures the chain's return: he eagerly bars the door with "some of the Godlies zealous works," while in the next room the Captain conjures up the devil to find it.

While Sir Godfrey may be a silly old Puritan enamoured with wealth, and his sister-in-law obviously ignorant of all but the most superficial mandates of

Puritanism, the real zealots in the play are the widow's servants, who display a ridiculously hypocritical and totally unenlightened piety. In them, Middleton indiscriminately caricatured Puritan, Separatist, and Sectarian traits. We must assume that their religious philosophy met with the approval of the widow and Sir Godfrey, because servants traditionally followed the religious leadership of their masters, and also because the widow agrees with them whenever they comment on religious matters in her presence.

These servants, Nicholas-Saint-Tantlings, Simon Saint-Mary Overies, and Frailty may be three of the most foolish, literal-minded, superficial, and morally stupid characters ever created. Like typical stage Puritans, they flaunt their piety: they are always on their way to church, dressed in black; they scorn all "vain exercises," and they especially hate stage plays because some actors once portrayed their pastor, Parson Pigman, as a drunken fool. Like Sir Godfrey, Nicholas hoards his money; he claims he doesn't have to give it to help his friend the Captain because his prayer book doesn't contain a chapter on charity.

Besides these comic Puritan traits, the servants also display several Anabaptist, even Familist character-

istics. They repeatedly declare that they cannot keep company with anyone who is guilty of so horrible a transgression as swearing, and they are so horrified by the sound of an oath that they swoon whenever they hear one. They also interpret the Bible with rigid literalness. Nicholas swoons (again!) when the Captain asks him to steal Sir Godfrey's gold chain because he is appalled at the thought of breaking the Biblical injunction not to steal. However, he will do what the Captain requires if it is asked of him properly:

Nic: Pray, do not wish me to bee hanged,
 anything else that I can do, had it been to
 rob, I would ha don't, but I must not steale,
 that's the word, the literall, thou shalt not
 steale: and would you wish me to steale then?

Pie: No, faith, that were too much, to speak
 truth: Why would thou nim it from him?

Nic: That I will. (p. 14).

Earlier in the play Nicholas, Frailty, and Simon agree heartily that they may lie, although they may not swear:

Nic: Simon Saint Mary Overies and Fraylty, pray
 make a lie for me to the knight my Maister, old
 Sir Godfrey.

Cor: A lie? may you lie then?

Fray: O I, we may lie, but we must not sweare.

And Simon illustrates his kinship with Familists

when he agrees, "True, wee may lie with our Neighbors wife, but wee must not swear we did so." (p. 10).

Simon is not the only member of his congregation who is guilty of the sins of the flesh. The zealots discuss the merits of Master Fulbellie, the minister, who is currently hosting a fast:

Sim: Maister Full-bellie? an honest man: he
feeds the flock well, for he's an excellent
feeder.

Frail: O I, I have seen him eate up a whole Pigge,
and afterward falls to the pettitoes. (p. 10)

The ambiguity of Frailty's last word here must have been intentional. I suspect that Middleton was aiming at a pun on "potatoes" and "petticoats."

In The Puritan Widow, Middleton clearly had no compulsion to play fairly in his ridicule of Puritans. Each character is called a "Puritan;" no one bothers to make clear that he belongs to any other religion or sect, just as no one bothers to make the distinction in Middleton's later play, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1611-3). Only one scene in the latter play, the famous christening scene, deals specifically with a particular religious type, and most critics view it as symbolic, reinforcing the overall messages of the play.²³ Others, however, think the scene was written primarily for comic effect and to satirize

the characters.²⁴ Certainly several levels of symbolism work simultaneously within the scene. On the most superficial level Middleton caricatures Puritans, showing them in a ludicrous light, mocking the travesties these heretics and hypocrites commit in the name of religion. He calls the religious characters "Puritans" here, but they, like the characters in The Puritan, really represent a hybrid of many Reform elements.

While we must conclude that the characters in A Chaste Maid are, indeed, Puritan--they do after all, participate in the baptism of an infant--they belong more to the Separatist than the Anglican Puritan faction, for they do not seem to be concerned with any of the more conventional bourgeois Puritan practices associated with the orthodox group. Since many of the Separatist Puritans fleeing English persecution settled in Amsterdam, that city quickly became associated with the Separatist group. One character, the First Puritan, refers to the fact that the infant has been christened "without idolatry or superstition/ After the pure manner of Amsterdam." (III,ii,4-5) She and the Second Puritan also speak with typical Puritan jargon, referring to various characters as "daughter" or "brethren," and they also show a contempt for popish influences, scorning the apostle spoons Whorehound gives

the child because the figures of the apostles carved upon them are "idolatrous."

Like the hypocrites in The Puritan and The Family of Love, these Puritans are greedy for the pleasures of the senses. They steal food and guzzle wine until they are falling down drunk, wetting their pants, and slobbering kisses all over Tim, the Cambridge scholar; all the while excusing their behavior with perversions of Calvinistic teachings. The First Puritan squirrels away sweets on the pretext of giving them to a sick child, and later, when reeling drunk, she falls while lunging to kiss Tim, she shrugs it off with, "'Tis but the common affliction of the faithful;/ We must embrace our falls." (III,ii,89-90)

This ability in the First Puritan to excuse her own obvious greed and licentiousness is akin to the spirit of antinomianism that Rebecca Purge displays in The Family of Love. Like a Familist, the First Puritan speaks of the joy of the "Spirit" in terms of sexual pleasure. "Children are blessings, if they be got with zeal/ By the brethern, as I have five at home." (III,ii,36-8) Trying to embrace Tim with a wet kiss, she blubbers, "Let me come next. Welcome from the wellspring of discipline, that waters all the brethern." (III,ii,186-7)

Later, Allwit wryly comments on some of their religious rites: "Go take a nap with some of the brethern, go,/ And rise up a well edified, boldified sister!"

(III,ii,207-8) While this scene entertains on one level as it satirizes the heresies and inanities of unorthodox opinion, it also illuminates more important problems which unorthodox opinion can create: deviations from the established doctrines pervert the religious significance of certain rituals and harm the society both spiritually and culturally.

The orthodox christening ceremony involves three important elements: the baptismal waters which signify the rebirth of the spirit and the cleansing from sin; the giving of gifts to signify the child's existence and to welcome him or her into the world; and the partaking of food and wine to celebrate the emergence of new life. The Puritans and gossips make a travesty of all three of these rituals as they revel their way through the scene. They defile the baptismal water by frequently associating it with human excrement. Urine is referred to several times, both as substitute for water as a cleansing agent and as the result of too much wine and too little self-control over the body. The Puritans call the child the "spit" of her father, and later, Tim makes much of the

slobbering kisses the women lavish on him. One of the gossips is concerned because her nineteen year old daughter is "too free" and "cannot lie dry in her bed," possibly because she wets her bed or because she frequently lies in the wet aftermath of sexual intercourse. Sexual fluids are referred to again at the end of the scene when Davy tells Allwit that "Lady Kix is dry, and hath no child." And the First Puritan makes a bad pun when she welcomes Tim "from the wellspring of discipline, that waters all the brethern."

The child receives only one gift to welcome her into the world, and that gift is from Whorehound, her illegitimate father, who, ironically, stands as her godfather. It is a small and commonplace gift--a standing cup with two apostle spoons--but the Puritans treat it with contempt and derision because the spoons sport "graven images." The feast, doubly significant during the Easter season because of its association with the Last Supper, becomes not a communion or a celebratory feast to commemorate the advent of a new life, but a drunken revelry. In the absence of respect for the religious ritual, the food and drink lose their symbolism, becoming instead the base objects to satisfy greed and gluttony. Finally, the all-pervading sense of illicit

lust and perverted sexual relationships give the child, not a sincere or spiritual welcome, but one tainted with carnality and uncleanness. By the end of the scene, the audience is well aware that the words of the First Gossip and First Puritan are true--that they have brought home a "kursen" soul: a soul christened with curses.

The satire against Puritans is as harsh in this play as it is against Familists in the earlier play, but after A Chaste Maid, a shift begins to take place in Middleton's attitude toward Puritans. This change may have stemmed from Middleton's reaction to changes in official Church philosophy. With the ascension of James I, the doctrine of the Anglican Church gradually began to move away from Calvinism and toward Arminianism, the doctrines of which Calvinists considered closely aligned with Roman Catholicism. While the High Anglicans, particularly those upper classes who associated themselves with the court, began to favor the Arminian view, which rejected the idea of unqualified predestination, the middle-class Puritan faction pushed the predestination doctrine to the opposite extreme, maintaining that God alone dispenses grace, and that only the foreordained elect should receive it. Further, they began to believe that God has deliberately damned a certain number of souls

who can never receive grace, even if they were to ask or work for it. Calvin did not teach this Supralapsarian doctrine, but it is an extension of his predestination theories upon which the Puritans relied so heavily. These movements away from the moderate Genevan theology intensified the controversy within the Church, making each side more bitter and more irreconcilable. As the religious distinctions became more important to all Church members, many Anglicans who had been content to follow the lead of Church officials began to find themselves faced with the decision to retain their belief in the Calvinistic doctrine or change their theological convictions to coincide with those of the king. Since the different factions were loosely associated with different classes, the religious feud became more and more a matter of class distinction and political differences.

HENGIST, KING OF KENT, OR THE MAYOR OF QUEENBOROUGH:

Lighthearted Satire of the Moderate Puritan

Middleton's last play which satirizes Puritans, Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough (1615-20), marks a shift in his attitudes toward Puritans. While he still mocks stuffy and dour religious zealots, his satire is far more benign than in the earlier plays. At about this time he had already begun to write his great tragedies, The Second Maiden's Tragedy (1611), The Changingling (1622), and Women Beware Women (1620-7), and the world he presents in them shows not only a "Calvinistic bias,"²⁵ as Irving Ribner and many others have mentioned, but actually a darker world which seems more compatible with the Supralapsarian view. At this time, Middleton was also developing a close association with the strongly Puritan London city fathers. He wrote masques and entertainments for them as early as 1611, and it seems likely that the maturing playwright was beginning to align himself more with the Puritan philosophy.

The Puritan character in Hengist, an unsophisticated tailor named Oliver, wants to become the mayor of Queenborough, but he is defeated in a general election by an even more rustic character, Simon. Outraged, Oliver vows

revenge against Simon and thereafter is referred to as Oliver the Rebel. While these names may seem to refer to Oliver Cromwell, one of the leaders of the rebel party during the civil war, it is unlikely that Middleton had Cromwell in mind when he wrote Hengist. Since the famous Parliamentarian and Commonwealth leader would have been, at most, only twenty-one, and still a communing member of the Anglican Church when the play was written, he could not have gained enough notoriety to have inspired Middleton's Oliver. Ellis has suggested that since Hengist was later revised, the name changes could have been added then; this possibility seems more likely.²⁶

The Oliver in Hengist seems orthodox and ordinary compared with the Puritans in Middleton's earlier plays; perhaps the worst thing that can be said about him is that he appears foolish in his excessive hatred of stage plays. When Simon has him arrested and brought to his house, Oliver begs to be released because "I understand there are players in thy house; dispatch me, I charge thee, in the name of all the brethren." And when Simon informs him that he intends to force him to see a play, he panics:

Oliv: O Devil! I conjure thee by Amsterdam!

Sim: Our word is past;
Justice may wink a while, but see at last.
The play begins. Hold, stop him, stop him!

Oliv: O that profane trumpet! O, O!

Sim: Set him down there, I charge you officers.

Oliv: I'll hide my ears and stop my eyes.

Sim: Down with his golls, I charge you.

Oliv: O tyranny, tyranny! revenge it, tribulation!
 For rebels there are many deaths; but
 sure the only way
 To execute a Puritan, is seeing of a play.
 O, I shall swound! (V,i)

These agonized cries continue throughout the scene until the players throw meal in Simon's face and rob him, which causes Oliver to become a great fan of the theatre.

Unlike Middleton's other Puritan characters, Oliver, if prudish and zealous, is no hypocrite or heretic. He seems to care genuinely for his wife and rails against Simon for keeping a mistress. Simon's only defense is to suggest that Oliver is impotent. Clearly no Anabaptist, Oliver has no licentiousness about him, and unlike any Sectarian, he covets the office of Mayor. Only one small piece of evidence points to the possibility of Oliver as a Separatist Puritan. His reference to Amsterdam in the preceding bit of dialogue associates him with the exiled zealots; anyone who spoke of it with good regard could automatically be classified as believing in the same religious ideals as those who fled and settled there. Other than that, Oliver very well fits the stereo-

type of the self-righteous, hardworking Puritan tailor, obsessed with the deadliness of sin and filled with pride in his family, his occupation and his religion.

A GAME AT CHESS:

The Villainies of the Roman Catholic Church

Middleton enjoyed ridiculing the foibles of the Puritans and other Reform sects during his early and middle playwriting years, but he virtually ignored the more popularly despised religious group, The Roman Catholics. His first and only satire against them, A Game at Chess, which opened at the Globe Theatre in 1624, is both a political and a religious satire in the context of the national and international events of the time. To the Jacobean English citizens, "Spanish," Catholic," and "enemy" had become synonymyous. Their hatred for Spanish Catholics, with their alleged plans for world dominion, is comparable to the hatred Americans felt for "godless" Communists during the 1950's. The issues went far beyond argument over religious dogma; the English truly believed that Catholic Spain wanted to destroy or dominate them.

A Game at Chess appeared amidst an outbreak of national jingoism, and because it so utterly reflected

popular opinion, it became the most successful play of its period. John Chamberlain wrote that it was "frequented by all sorts of people old and younge, rich and poore, masters and servants, papists and Puritans, wise men, et ct., churchmen and statesmen."²⁷

The play is more than a simple diatribe against an alien force which the country uniformly despised, for A Game of Chess, despite its portrayal of James as a devout and perfect ruler, also slandered to some extent the king and his foreign, domestic and religious policies. Tension was rising between the Puritan faction and the king, who was forcing changes in the Anglican Church. Many of James' subjects had begun to distrust and dislike him because he desired peace with Spain, England's traditional enemy. He also had alienated many by replacing Calvinism with Arminian theology in Church doctrine, thus (according to the Puritans) drawing the Anglican Church toward a reinstatement of Roman Catholic doctrines. Additionally, his autocratic theories had made him seem to proclaim himself a deity. When he attempted to arrange a marriage between his son Charles, the heir apparent, and the Spanish infanta, he became even less popular, and when Prince Charles returned from Spain without a bride, England rejoiced at James' failure, but welcomed the prince home

with wild joy.

In this introduction to the play, J.W. Harper describes the scene:

The bells sounded and the cannons roared a welcome. The Strand was so choked with people shouting, "long live the Prince of Wales" that the royal carriage could scarcely pass. Wealthy citizens gave banquets in the streets for all comers and debtors were released from prison by anonymous benefactors . . . and at St. Paul's an anthem was sung from the 114th Psalm: "When Israel came out of the house of Egypt, and the home of Jacob from amongst the barbarous people."²⁸

While the play only obliquely refers to the marriage negotiations, it does capitalize upon the English hatred for the Spanish which escalated as a result of them. Upon the return of Charles and Buckingham, rumors about Spanish impropriety settled thickly around London, rumors which Middleton used to ridicule and vitiate the Spanish Catholics in the eyes of the English playgoers. Since the players knew that A Game at Chess would meet with royal disapproval, they opened when James was out of London, and they gave it the first long run in history. All new plays before this had been placed in the repertory and played alternately with several others, but A Game at Chess ran for nine consecutive performances²⁹ before the king returned to London and complied with the Spanish Ambassador's request to close the theatre, censure the

players, and ban future performances of the play. How it became licensed in the first place is a mystery, but perhaps Puritan city fathers, or even Lord Buckingham himself, who by this time had turned his vicious side toward the Spanish, intervened on the players' behalf to see that it was approved by the Master of Revels.

To extricate the religious from the political implications in A Game at Chess seems impossible; nevertheless, Middleton's satire against Roman Catholics can be identified in the play. A long parade of critics have already dissected and analyzed the play; many agree that most of the characters are based upon contemporary religious and political figures or personifications of religious institutions. For example, the White King presumably represents James I; the White Knight, Prince Charles; and the White Duke, the Duke of Buckingham. The White Bishop represents Archbishop Abbot; the White Queen stands for the Church of England. In the Black House, the Black King represents Philip IV of Spain; the Black Queen, the Roman Catholic Church; the Black Duke, Philip's Minister Olivares; the Black Bishop, the Father General of the Jesuits. The Black Knight, a caricature of the newly replaced Spanish Ambassador to England, the Duke of Gondomar, represents one of the most despised men in London. The Duke was

villified for his alleged power over James and for his role in the execution of Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the darlings of the Renaissance. The villain of the play, he hatches intrigues against the White House and boasts about his ability to manipulate and deceive in order to destroy England and further the Spanish goal of world dominion. The actor who played Gondomar "counter-feited his person to the life, with all his graces and faces,"³⁰ wearing an old suit of his and riding in a litter similar to the one the ambassador was forced to employ because of his physical infirmity, a fistula.

The Fat Bishop is a caricature of Marco Antonio Dominis, the former Archbishop of Spalatro. He converted from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism in order to enjoy preferential treatment from James, but when he was offered advancement from Rome, he returned to the Catholic Church in 1622. The English public found him an odious creature, partially for his theological vacillations, partly for his severe treatment of patients when he was Master at the English Hospital of the Savoy. He stood in the minds of the English people as a self-serving, religious hypocrite.³¹

The play is full of popular clichés about the outrages and idolotries committed by Roman Catholics.

Middleton probably drew extensively upon the large selection of anti-Catholic/anti-Spanish propaganda which was constantly circulating throughout London during James' reign. These broadsides and pamphlets "exposed" all the vices and sins supposedly committed by Catholics as well as enumerated the heretical beliefs and practices of the religion itself. Middleton followed the lead of these propagandizers, satirizing Catholic doctrines, especially their belief in a priest's ability to absolve sin. The Fat Bishop actually has a book which contains a systemized list of various sins and the price one must pay to be pardoned from them:

Bl. Kn.: (Reads) 'For wilful murder thirteen
pound four shillings
And sixpence'--That's reasonable
cheap--'For killing,
Killing, killing, killing, killing,
killing'--
Why there's nothing but killing,
Bishop, of this side.

Fat Bishop: Turn the sheet over, you shall
find adultery
And other trivial sins,

Bl. Kn.: Adultery? Oh, I'm in 't now.--
(Reads) 'For adultery a couple
Of shillings, and for fornication
fivepence.'--
Mass, those are two good pennyworths!
I cannot
See how a man can mend himself.
(IV,ii,89-100)

The Black Knight's Pawn find himself in an agony

of guilt because he has committed a sin for which no payment has been established--he has gelded the White Bishop's Pawn. He searches about for someone, anyone to absolve him, and finally, on the advice of the Fat Bishop, resolves to kill his victim so that he can simply pay the "thirteen pound, four shillings" for "wilful murder" and be done with it.

Naturally since sin is so easily dispensed with, Middleton's Black House has no compunction to be virtuous, and the members have lost all sense of moral standards. The Black Knight, actually proud of his long list of heinous deeds, chides the Black Knight's Pawn for being so queasy over such a little sin as gelding a man. He readily admits that Catholics are no strangers to gluttony, ambition, dissembling, and lechery, as well as more serious transgression.

Lechery, of course, is the vice most amusing to mock, and as in his satire against Anabaptists, Middleton makes the most of the Catholics' supposed proclivity for carnality. While the members of the White House avoid sex, the Black House is full of casual lust. Middleton could not let slip by some of the horrible accounts of nuns in frequent need of agents to abort unborn children (I,i,217) or the "six thousand infants' heads found in

a fishpond" at the ruins of a nunnery (V,iii,129). Most of the play's action centers around the various plots the Black Bishop's Pawn uses to seduce the White Queen's Pawn, and when she resists him, his schemes to take her by force. The members of the Black House also use sex as a weapon as well as a source of pleasure. The Black Queen's Pawn, angry with the Black Bishop for seducing her niece, is willing to bed with him in order to expose and betray him, and the Black King (Philip IV) expresses his "lust" for power over the White Queen (The Church of England) in sexual terms in a letter to the Black Bishop's Pawn:

"These are therefore to require you by the burning affection I bear to the rape of devotion, that speedily upon the surprisal of her, by all watchful advantage you make some attempt upon the White Queen's person, whose fall or prostitution our lust most violently rages for."

(II,i,20-4)

Despite their easy carnality, the Catholics of the Black House cling to certain notions about the proper roles of husbands and wives. While the Calvinists believed that sex could serve as a source of comfort and joy between spouses, many Catholics of the period believed it a necessary evil to be used only for procreation. To them, lust for one's own marriage partner was as much of a sin as

lust for anyone, and the Black Bishop's Pawn lectures the White Queen's Pawn when she gives up the idea of marrying the White Bishop's Pawn after she discovers he cannot function as a sexual partner: "It seems you refused him for defect:/ Therein you stand not pure from the desire/ That other women have in ends of marriage." (I,i,165-7) These words are not spoken in complete sincerity, however. The Black Bishop's Pawn palpably lusts for the White Queen's Pawn, using every device he can to seduce her.

Middleton, like all orthodox Englishmen, understood that Catholicism sprang from a marriage of Christianity and paganism, and he mocks the resulting superstition and "idolotry" inherent within it. He gives several characters speeches with references to pagan gods, especially those conventionally associated with lust. He also mocks the ornament and ritual used in the Catholic mass which Calvinists believed obfuscates true worship. The inability of the members of the Black House's to distinguish pagan superstition from Christian "truths" presents one reason why these members are so spiritually incompetent.

While all this mockery of Roman Catholic idolotry and sinfulness is bitter enough in tone, Middleton directs even stronger satire against other aspects of the older religion. The Jesuits, perhaps the single most despised

religious group in England during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, were radical Catholics who came to England as missionaries to win converts, inflame the Catholic population, and encourage revolt against the English government. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order, complains in the induction to A Game at Chess that his followers have failed him because they have not spread his heresies well enough throughout England:

I thought they'd spread over the world by this time.
 Covered the earth's face and made dark the land
 Like the Egyptian grasshoppers.
 Here's too much light appears shot from the eyes
 Of truth and goodness never yet deflowered. (I,i,6-10)

Middleton later makes much of the Jesuits' policy of equivocation and assigns them pride in good Catholics' ability to dissemble. The Black Knight even calls it the "prime virtue."

The Jesuits, however, are only agents of Spain and the Roman Catholic Church, which seeks to overpower or subvert England and her Church, the defender of the true faith. The cruelly sexual terms the Black King uses in his letter to the Black Bishop's Pawn concerning the "prostitution" of the White Queen his "lust most violently rages for," expose the absolute evil inherent within Catholic Spain's designs upon England.

With all these vices, no wonder that the entire

Black House is bound for hell by the end of the play. But Middleton, not content with merely placing Spanish Catholics in hell to burn as unrepentant sinners, hints that they are in league with Satan himself, having gone so far as to accept the mark of the Beast described in the Book of Revelation. The White King says the Black House princes have "perdition-branded foreheads," (V,iii,83) and the Black Knight's Pawn recognizes the disguised Black Bishop's Pawn "by the Catholical mark you wear about you,/ The mark above your forehead." (v,i,16-7)

Spanish Catholics were naturally outraged by this irreverent mockery of their religion and their country, and the Spanish Ambassador Don Carlos complained bitterly to James about the play's effect on English citizens: " There was such merriment, hubbub and applause that even if I had been many leagues away it would not have been possible for me not to have taken notice of it."³² His rage and fear at the play's reception can be seen in a letter he wrote to the Count-Duke of Olivares:

During these last four days more than 12,000 persons have all heard the play of A Game At Chess. . . . All these people come out of the theatre so inflamed against Spain that, as a few Catholics have told me who went secretly to see the play, my person would not be safe in the streets; others have advised me to keep to my house with a good guard, and this is being done.³³

James, none too pleased himself, ordered his Privy Council to ban all future performances and arraign the players and author on the technical grounds that they had broken the law in representing a Christian king on stage. Middleton's arrest was ordered, but whether he actually served any time in prison is unknown. If he did, his stay was brief. Whatever the outcome, A Game at Chess marked the end of Middleton's satire against religious groups, perhaps the end of his playwriting career altogether. If he did pick up his pen after this time, it was to create the hopelessly dark, Supralapsarian world of Women Beware Women (1620-7).

Because Middleton's theological leanings were Calvinistic, all his plays which treat religions and cults reflect his Christian biases. The next chapter explores his attitudes toward another popular Renaissance "religion," the code of honor, which had been considered sacred by knights and noblemen since the medieval period. While the playwright extolled the virtues of the honor ideal, particularly in the early part of his writing career, he limited his praise primarily to those aspects which accord with orthodox Christian principles.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1

A.H. Bullen found this work so intolerably long and boring that he concedes only grudgingly that it is Middleton's work. See the introduction to The Works of Thomas Middleton, vol. I (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885), p. xiii.

2

H.G. Wood, "Puritanism" Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. 10, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 507.

3

Wood, p. 511; M.M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 347.

4

Burleigh and Leicester, Elizabeth's close advisors, Archbishop Grindel, and many Parliament leaders were in sympathy with Puritan reforms.

5

Knappen, p. 212.

6

Robert Brown, founder of this sect, claimed that the Anglican Church was corrupt and that it was unchristian to attend its services. He was imprisoned for his outspoken arguments, and in 1589, he recanted and reformed. However, Barrow took up the banner of Brown's doctrines and the congregation became known as Barrowists. He was hanged for heresy and treason in 1593. See William Clark, The Anglican Reformation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), pp. 325ff; M.M. Knappen, pp. 307ff; Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama Under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.78.

7

See pp. 25-6.

8

Paul Kevin Meagher, Thomas C. O'Brien, and Sister Consuelo Maria Aherne, eds., "Familists," Dictionary of Religion, vol. 2 (Washington: Corpus Publications, 1979), 1316.

9

Annals I, i, quoted in George T. Buckley, Atheism in the English Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 48.

10

Buckley, p. 49.

11

Clifford Davidson, "Middleton and The Family of Love," English Miscellany 20 (1969), 84.

12

See Heinemann.

13

This was included in a preface to the reader when the play was published.

14

Buckley, p. 49.

15

Algernon Charles Swinburne, The Age of Shakespeare (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1908), p. 159.

16.

Levin, pp. 63ff.

17

See Anthony Covatta, Thomas Middleton's City Comedies (Lewisburg N.Y.: Bucknell University Press, 1973); Richard Levin, The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 61; George E. Rowe, Jr., Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

18

Quoted in Davidson, p. 86.

19

Heinemann, p. 284.

20

D.J. Lake, "Middleton's Hand in The Puritan: The Evidence of Vocabulary and Spelling," Notes & Queries NS 19, no. 12 (1972), 459. see also: Marilyn L. Williamson, "Middleton's Workmanship and the Authorship of The Puritan," Notes & Queries, 202 (1957), 50; R.V. Holdsworth, "'Lie By it' in Middleton," Notes & Queries, 226 (1981), 242; Also, Bullen, Dunkel, Fleay, Hopkins, Ward and Maxwell favor Middleton.

21

Heinemann, p. 285.

22

This and other references to the script are taken from The Puritaine Widdow, ed. John S. Farmer, The Tudor Facsimile Texts (England) n.p. (1911). Since there are no act or scene divisions, I have referred to page numbers.

23

See Arthur F. Marotti, "Fertility and Comic Form in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside," Comparative Drama, 3 (1969), 71; Rowe, pp. 135ff; 161ff.

24

Charles A. Hallett, Middleton's Cynics: A Study of Middleton's Insight into the Moral Psychology of the Mediocre Mind, Jacobean Drama Studies, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg, Austria: Institute for English Speech and Literature, 1977), p. 130, Covatta, p. 18.

25

Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest For Moral Order (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), p. 125.

26

Havelock Ellis, note in The Mayor of Queenborough, by Thomas Middleton in The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists: Thomas Middleton, The Mermaid Series (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1980), p. 30. All future references to the script are taken from this edition. The play is broken down into acts and scenes, but lines are not numbered.

27

John Chamberlain, The Letters of John Chamberlain, ed. Norman McClure (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939), p. 578. This letter was written to Sir Dudley Carlton on August 21, 1624. Although Chamberlain wanted to see A Game at Chess, he did not because "I could not sit so long, for we must have been there before one a cloke at farthest to find any room."

28

J.W. Harper, Introduction to A Game At Chess, by Thomas Middleton (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) p. XXIV.

29

Chamberlain, p. 578.

30

Chamberlain, p. 578.

31

Harper, pp. xii-xvi; Milton Arthur Buettner, Introduction to A Game at Chess, by Thomas Middleton, Jacobean Drama Studies, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg, Austria: Institute for English Speech and Literature, 1975); Frederick S. Boas, An Introduction to Stuart Drama (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 245-7; Barker, pp. 147-8; Norman A. Brittin, Thomas Middleton (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), pp. 73-4; Dorothy M. Farr, Thomas Middleton and the Drama of Realism (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), pp. 99-100.

32

Quoted in Harper, p. xiii.

33

Quoted in Gerald Eades Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956). p. 872.

CHAPTER THREE

HONOR AND IDOLATRY:

The Remnants of Chivalry

Chivalry as we know it today has little to do with spiritual concerns, but the Renaissance nobleman, steeped in the tradition of knight errantry and the venerable system of honor was influenced spiritually as well as philosophically by the chivalric code. He clung to its precepts tenaciously and fervently, accepting them as ultimate truths as surely as he accepted basic Christian conventions. Although many of the ideals of chivalric honor were based upon Christian virtues, others were borrowed from other philosophies and religions, and some of these directly conflicted with the Christian ethic. Still, the Renaissance nobleman considered the chivalric dictates sacred, or at least divinely justified. At the very least they imposed such strong social demands that at times he felt impelled to follow them even when they were antithetical to the teachings of Christ and His Church. Whenever he was forced to choose between the principles of one to the exclusion of the other, the scrupulous Christian aristocrat or gentlemen was faced with a social, moral,

and spiritual dilemma that burdened his conscience and his soul.

Historically, the chivalric ideal grew from two ancient European sources, vassalage and religion, both of which were essential to basic existence during the Dark and early Middle Ages. In this uncivilized period, men banded together in tribes, and under the rules of vassalage, swore allegiance to the leader, pledging their strength and their lives to protect him and the other tribe members. Because these various Germanic bands of barbarians earned their living by murder and plunder, warring among themselves for the most negligible of reasons, their survival depended upon tribal unity and the fierce loyalty that fostered allegiance to a particular leader. Until the seventh century, the "ceremony" binding knights (or "chevaliers" in France) to their lords was only a personal oath of loyalty, but gradually ritual was added, and as the settling effects of civilization began to alter the way of life, such notions as land grants in return for a promise of fealty became de rigueur. By the end of the eighth century an intricate system of vassalage operated throughout Europe and had begun to shape a complex society based more and more upon an agricultural rather than a nomadic lifestyle.

Kings and countries were little regarded by most

people until the late twelfth century, although great lords often swore allegiance to their king in return for large land grants. In turn, the lords often awarded their bravest and most loyal knights parcels of land in exchange for their valor. Some knights, having amassed huge land holdings, employed serfs to live on their estates and farm the land. Later, when peace came more frequently and regularly, they laid aside their swords, and taking an interest in their fiefdoms, learned to dispense justice as civic leaders and magistrates. By the eleventh century, when feudalism was well established, the distinctions between knights and nobles blurred. The warriors took on social pretensions, attaching titles of nobility to their names and adopting elitist attitudes about their place in the class structure.

Yet, knights remained uncivilized by courtly or Church standards, for they still existed primarily on bloodshed. They not only feuded among themselves and against other lords in behalf of their own, but they also became notorious scourges to the citizenry. Traveling in bands, they robbed and pillaged their neighbors, not sparing even monasteries and bishoprics. The Church naturally cast about for a way to channel the explosive energy of these powerful renegades. The Crusades answered

their needs.

The French were the first to fight in that long series of wars against the Turks, but soon other nations, encouraged by the Church, took up the sacred banners. Pope Urban gave warring knights the choice of burning in hell for their sins against their countrymen or redeeming themselves by reclaiming the Holy Land for Christianity. Since the Church needed to build a large military force, it took on the responsibility of creating more knights, and soon it became the main institution conferring knighthood. To make the office seem more attractive, the knighting ceremony developed as an highly elaborate, poetic ritual, emphasizing the spiritual nature of the chivalric commitment. The status of the knight consequently became more elevated.

Although the Church asserted that all willing comers, even peasants, might be knighted if they possessed great faith and morals, most knights still believed that lineage determined the essence of a man and that only the well bred were capable of true chivalric virtues. Still, since the Church needed many able-bodied warriors to undertake the arduous journey to the Holy Land, it tended to disregard class distinction in order to fill the ranks. The Pope insisted that knights, whether base-born or noble, existed on a rarified plane apart from conventional society because

they had dedicated themselves to the highest service possible: the service of God. "The highest order that God has made and willed is the order of Chivalry," stated Chretien de Troyes.¹

The knights became identified as the Christian bulwark against the infidel, and from this sense evolved true chivalry, when mystery and religious ardor gave knights a sense of purpose and spirituality. With it was born an heroic ideal: gallantry and a chivalric code that was to be manifest in the romantic image of the knight. From the Crusades on, he would always be seen on his gilded horse, banners fluttering, riding off to years of sacrifice and struggle for the sake of Christendom, and the aura which surrounded him became more and more idealized as time passed.

During the thirteenth century, economic conditions, the huge cost of knightly regalia, and the long, miserable journey to the Crusades made many of the less religiously-minded nobles unwilling to bear the high cost of becoming knights. They began to separate themselves as a class, associating with land management and civic affairs rather than soldiering. Once again, knighthood became a distinctly separate social class, and while nobles may have considered them merely glorified warriors, knights thought of them-

selves as part of a superior and godly institution. The knight who took his vows seriously lived a dignified and sober life, dedicated not only to Christian service, but also to a code of ethics and behavior that set him apart from the brutality of feudal society. The true knight, humble, courageous, and honorable, also was scrupulous about avenging insults to himself and his family.²

As nations became more centralized and knights became more plentiful, their protection and patronage began to fall to kings who needed their services to protect their countries as well as to fight the infidels. Youths desiring to join the chivalric ranks came to court at a very early age to learn the art of war and proper knightly behavior. Naturally these young men developed a fierce loyalty to the king and a taste for refinement, for they rapidly assimilated the rarified manners and philosophies associated with the court. As this new breed of courtier knights became more appreciative of symbolism and aesthetics, the rites of chivalry became more complex, mystical and ornamental, and this, in turn, further elevated the position of the knight and associated the institution with great pagentry and display.

By the fourteenth century, the Crusades were ending, and new methods of European warfare made the cumbersome,

heavily mounted knight obsolete on the battlefield. Knights who wished to remain soldiers adapted to modern methods of warfare, but the desire for the romance, mysticism, and gallant code of behavior that had defined the actions of the old Crusaders lingered in their hearts. Kings, too, hungered for the civilized and beautiful rituals they found in the Arthuran romances, and because the fiction they found in such tales became confused with history, they believed the chivalric ideal could be recaptured. Many kings went so far as to try to duplicate the impossibly lavish courts of gilded imagination, where elegant, elaborate rules governed behavior in every point from the proper way to woo a lady to how to pay homage to the monarch. At some of these extravagant palaces, kings sponsored romantic, allegorical jousting tournaments where bejeweled ladies represented goddesses and knights of noble decent battled one another. At some of these tournaments, the jousts were carefully choreographed; in others, however, the tilts were genuine and dangerous, and often deadly.

Although they were despised by the Church as "pagan idolotries," these lavish displays of mock war remained highly fashionable throughout the Renaissance. The court of Elizabeth I particularly loved them because they served

to intensify the aura of sacred mysticism which surrounded the ideal of the Virgin queen. Later, however, the military aspects of these jousts separated from the display. By the end of the reign of James I, two separate and distinct institutions had evolved from the knightly tournaments: the pageant, beloved by the king and court; and the duel, illegal but popular among soldiers and many of the gentry who considered themselves kin to the noble, honorable knights of yore.

Clearly, secular considerations moved chivalry away from the religious idealism which had nourished it, but it never was separated from the symbolism, ardor, and sense of mystery that the Church had inspired. It remained permeated with a mystical aura of divine strength and righteousness as well as with an intense class consciousness bred of centuries of courtly influence. Consequently, many people came to believe that the chivalric code represented a sacred ideal, properly understood and revered only by those born of genteel blood; and since the upper classes claimed the ideal as their own, once again the distinction between nobility and chivalry blurred. However, having lost its connection with the medieval Church and the Crusades, chivalry also lost sight of its religious and practical reasons for being. Instead, the ritual

which surrounded the ideal became elevated to form the basis for new ideals which became as important to the consummate gentleman as Christianity itself was. To him, the sacred virtues consisted of courage, loyalty, rank, conduct which accorded with a prescribed code of behavior, and a refined sense of class consciousness and individualism. In some respects, the tradition had come full circle, back to the feudal system where the lord and protector of the realm had been almost deified and rigid class structure kept the society neatly categorized. The intense devotion to a standard-bearer had shifted to the Church during the Crusades, and then to the monarch by the time of Elizabeth I. When James came to the throne with his elitist ideas concerning class structure and the proper role of kings as "gods," many noblemen found it easy to align their views and taste with his. Not only did he answer the need for a lordly paragon, but he also made courtiers so aware of class distinctions that superciliousness became fashionable.³

James' philosophy gained wider acceptance as the Church came more under the influence of Arminianism, for this new "aristocratic" religion fostered both a greater appreciation of the high-minded individual and a contempt for the more democratic religions of the lower and middle

classes. At first, middle-class Calvinists also accepted justification of the privileged class as reasonable and natural because both the Bible and tradition clearly delineated the proper roles of rulers and subjects, and servants and masters. Also, since they had grown up under Tudor autocracy, most accepted at least in part James' autocratic theories concerning the role of kings as "God's lieutenants."

However, changing times, economic conditions, and middle-class attitudes soon rendered these ideas anachronistic, and because the upper classes failed to adopt a more democratic attitude toward the new bourgeoisie, that element became resentful. Scorn for the aristocracy grew as merchants and tradesmen discovered that they, with their dedication to the work ethic, were able to earn far more than the gentry, who, by tradition, were not allowed to become involved with trade or craft. They were locked into "gentlemanly" careers such as agriculture, military, government, law, medicine, or scholarship, all of which were long on respectability but short on profits during the early seventeenth century. Unhampered by the niceties of the code and no longer in awe of their social superiors, the bourgeoisie began to make fortunes at the expense of the aristocrats. Wealthy merchants were buying their own

baronies and coats of arms, and some rivaled or even bettered in lands and wealth some of the most respected and well-established families. Also, as they gained a sense of importance, many members of the middle class began to shoulder civil and political responsibilities that heretofore had fallen exclusively to the well-born. By the late sixteenth century, London as well as Commons was run by the middle-class Puritan faction.

The upper classes, overwhelmed by the advancing bourgeoisie, retreated to their cliquish societies and aristocratic orders of knighthood. No one below the status of gentleman (a class below nobility but superior to the middle class) was considered eligible for participation in the polite formalities of the chivalric code, by now known as the honor code or the code of gentlemanly conduct. Most of the bourgeoisie, preoccupied with practical or spiritual concerns, were content to leave social codes and ritual to the upper classes,⁴ who clung to the honor code passionately, even instinctively, because it represented some of the last vestiges delineating their superiority. To many, these rituals became more important than civil law, and perhaps as important as orthodox religious laws.⁵ Hence, honor came to be deified by Renaissance gentlemen and noblemen. In 1579, Cervase Markham defined it as "the

food of every great Spirit, and the very god which creates in high minds heroical actions; it is so delicate and puer that any excesse doth stain it, and unjust action dishonour it . . . an ignoble deed utterly ruins it."⁶

Obviously then, honor existed as a kind of fragile and divine object, usually possessed by only those who deserve it by birthright, but easily lost or marred.⁷ To the haughty Renaissance nobleman, one of the surest ways to lose honor was to accept an insult meekly, and since the law would not punish a man for merely insulting another, the custom of personal revenge for insult became fashionable, even necessary. Perhaps, as Ruth Kelso maintains, the honor code was modified to justify duelling, "that lawless fashion,"⁸ but the lineage of duelling and the revenge ethic goes back to venerable beginnings. Certainly the laws of the duelling code were contrary to the Christian ideal, but they grew out of the revered chivalric tradition which allowed no wrong to go unrighted or unrevenged.

The philosophy of duelling to avenge honor was rooted in the old tradition of judicial combat, a contest between two parties to determine truth or justice when the legal system was unable to determine a verdict. Judicial combat was sanctioned by law in medieval times because it was assumed

that God would grant victory to the innocent or wronged party. Although after the decline of the medieval Church, the duel for honor was sanctified by neither law, crown, nor orthodox religion in England, the custom survived into the eighteenth century and beyond. It was especially popular between 1611 and 1640, despite the fact that Anglican preachers constantly reminded their congregations that vengeance belonged to God alone and that bloodshed for private revenge had no place in the Christian world. The purpose of the courts, they maintained, was to provide justice to all citizens of the realm. Francis Bacon called duelling "a kind of satanicall illusion and apparition of honor; against religion, against lawes, against morale vertue."⁹

James I particularly hated duelling, but ironically, he served to promote rather than discourage it. Because he was fond of French and Italian fashions, his courtiers adopted many European practices, including the one of private revenge. Also, the Scotsmen who accompanied the king to England made their contribution; these hot-headed men who had long accepted blood revenge as a simple and practical way to dispense justice, quickly popularized it among the lusty and eager English. In an effort to curb the violence his subjects were inflicting upon one another, James

published several treaties imploring them to abandon the practice, but even the king could not stem the popularity of duelling, because honor was preferred above life, laws, country, and freedom. Endurance of injuries and contempt signified that a man was unworthy of honor, and knightly dignity would not permit carrying a quarrel to magistrates who more than likely hailed from a lower class. Those who were devoted to the honor code actually considered the civil law a debased form of justice, suitable only for those too ignoble to govern themselves. Even the high-minded Sir Phillip Sidney challenged and fought the Earl of Oxford despite the protests of Elizabeth I; he claimed it was the only way to maintain his dignity after the verbal insult the Earl paid him on the tennis court.¹⁰

Many Elizabethans and Jacobeans from the lower and middle classes also agreed that duelling for private revenge was justified in certain cases. Society allowed a man to kill in self-defense or in retaliation for base offenses, especially when the law could not or would not administer the proper justice. Since most Elizabethans believed in the ancient adage that God strengthened the arm of the righteous party, the religious aura of triumphing virtue clung to the duelling ideal and gave it spiritual significance. Even as late as the seventeenth

century, European courts reflected this mentality: legally, the heir of a murdered father could not qualify for his inheritance until he has revenged his death either through the legal system or, failing that, by his own hand. England had no such statute, but many citizens considered it a moral law basic to the structure of their civilization.¹²

Many points of etiquette grew up in England concerning the proper forms of revenge. It was considered improper to challenge a man to duel at a later time, but one might be excused for becoming so injured by a base insult that he immediately flew into a rage and killed his adversary. Even the law recognized "hot blood" as an extenuating circumstance, for if a man slew another in this fashion, the crime was counted as manslaughter, not murder, and carried the possibility of a royal pardon.¹³ Also, if a man felt impelled to seek blood revenge, he had to win it in a fair and open fight. The secret, Italianate way involving disguise, ambush, or poison was contrary to the English sense of fair play.

As the seventeenth century progressed, those who lived by the chivalric code became more and more sensitive to insult and came to consider trivial reasons justification for duelling. The custom, nevertheless, came more and more under the "civilizing" influence of French and

Italian practices which locked the ceremonies of challenge and acceptance into an inflexible and highly elaborate ritual. The revenge ethic became confined to the esoteric few, because most English citizens, while still maintaining a reverence for the religious obligations of blood revenge in some extreme cases, deplored the practice of private duels fought in secret for a strange notion of honor.

The subject of honor, especially as it became associated with blood revenge, became popular on the stage during the Jacobean era, particularly for aristocratic audiences. During the early part of the seventeenth century, the English dramatists attacked the revenge ethic, emphasizing the idea that revenge belongs to God. After 1615, however, poets began to glorify the honor code, and characters who evaded their obligation to duel were ridiculed or scorned.¹⁴ Middleton, too, held a reverence for the code and its attendant requirements; however, he did not adhere to the extreme and rigid dictates which his faddish generation loved. While he did not disavow men's obligation to behave according to the rules of gentlemanly conduct, he maintained a more idealistic perspective of what true honor should be.

As a writer, Middleton was fortunate in that he could understand and appreciate both sides of the class

struggle. His father was a craftsman, a bricklayer, and Middleton himself enjoyed a long and apparently harmonious association with the bourgeoisie city fathers of London. Yet, since his family boasted a coat of arms, and he called himself "gentleman,"¹⁵ surely he also understood the esoteric attitudes and practices of the well-born. Many of his characters speak about honor, and for the most part, his views seem consistent with the highest Christian and chivalric ideals offered by the honor code, but he criticized and satirized the perverted standard of honor that ignored orthodox Christian morality.

A FAIR QUARREL:

The Compromise Between Divine and Social Honor

A Fair Quarrel, written in collaboration with William Rowley in 1616-17, deals directly with the issue of honor and the conflicts inherent between the various aspects of the code. Rowley was responsible for the subplots, Middleton for the main action,¹⁶ and although the subplots reinforce the honor motifs of the main plot, only Middleton's contribution to the play will be considered here. The action ostensibly concerns the subject of duelling, but in the play's unraveling, we see that Middleton and Rowley

are in fact demonstrating the different attitudes people have toward honor. A Fair Quarrel has been called a "problem play" designed to censure duelling and to curry favor with the king,¹⁷ but more than that, it illustrates how society has devalued the ideal of honor.

The action revolves around a high-minded young man, Captain Ager, who, as a soldier, is a direct descendant of the crusading knights. He is forced into a situation where he must choose between a code which insists that he duel for the sake of his reputation and the higher, divine honor code based upon truth and righteousness. Middleton presents him as mild-tempered and amicable, possessing the more obvious virtues of an honorable gentleman; he is proud but not ostentatious, mild-mannered but strong and courageous. A good soldier, he values his own worth and that of his comrades. The Colonel, his friend, then rival, typifies the braggart warrior so bound to his own sense of importance and to the idea that honor equals reputation that he has misplaced all sense of true honor.

The Colonel becomes enraged when Captain Ager's friend favorably compares Ager with the Colonel. In turn, Ager, believing that although his army rank is subordinate, his worth is not, refuses to accede to the Colonel's demand that he admit his own inferiority. This

provokes the Colonel even further, and eventually he loses control and calls Ager "the son of a whore." At this point the Colonel has actually proved himself dishonorable because he has slandered a virtuous woman, her dead husband, and her son, Captain Ager, but according to the rules of chivalry, it is up to Ager as her champion to prove her innocence and defend her reputation. He would have just cause to draw against the Colonel immediately after this base insult, but because his kinsman has overheard their argument and stripped them of their weapons to keep them from fighting, Ager is unable to depend upon the "hot blood" defense and seek vindication on the spot. He is forced to issue a challenge.

According to Fredson Bowers, an authority on the Renaissance honor code, Middleton presented Ager in the best possible light to Jacobean audiences, the Colonel in the worst. He wanted his audiences to sympathize with the younger man, but he also wanted them to be aware that the law would condemn him if he should kill the Colonel in a formal duel.¹⁸ But Ager has little choice. According to tradition, the highest point of honor in a man is courage; the only important point of honor in a woman is chastity, which also reflects upon the honor of the men in her family. If a woman loses her honor by fornication,

adultery, or even rape, the honor of the entire family becomes stained. Since his mother's virtue has been impugned, Ager must show courage and champion her to preserve both their honors before the world.

The motif of a woman's chastity manifesting her honor and the honor of her family is common throughout Renaissance literature. In Middleton's Hengist, King of Kent, (1615-20), Devonshire is alarmed when Castiza hints that she has been raped. He declares that his honor depends upon her right to claim to be inviolate. In Women Beware Women, (1620-7), Bianca calls her honor "leproous" because she has committed adultery, and Hipollito kills Leantio when he discovers the younger man is having an affair with his sister. His main concern, he says, is for the family's honor.

However, since sexual virtue is a private matter, usually known only to the parties involved, the rules of the honor code were adapted to provide for a woman's reputation, or appearance of virtue. With the influence of the courtly love ideal, sexual infidelity became somewhat accepted among some aristocrats (see Chapter Four), particularly in Italy and in France.¹⁹ This acceptance led to a slight alteration in the requirements: it became a point of honor for a woman's paramour or member of her family

to protect her image, no matter what indiscretions she may have committed in her private life.

Once again, these manifestations of the honor code hark back to the determining of virtue and truth by judicial combat. The old knights' belief that God grants divine strength to the righteous party automatically made the victor appear possessed of true honor. The vanquished party not only lost his honor because God had proved him wrong, he also lost his soul, for anyone who dared to champion a cause he knew to be a lie would receive no mercy under God's immutable justice. Later, as worldly influences undermined the knights' dependence upon spirituality and "divine strength," the honor code subtly shifted to revere the reality of victory and the appearance of honor more than the impossible-to-discern truth. Even the early Arthurian romance tales were concerned with all-important reputation. Although all of Arthur's court was aware of Guinevere's adultery with Lancelot, it was nevertheless essential to the continued functioning of the court and to Arthur's friendship with the man who had cuckolded him that Guinevere's public reputation be unblemished. The "truth" then, depended upon the strength of Lancelot's arm, not the reality of Guinevere's guilt or innocence. By the same token, in terms of the modified

honor code, it should not matter to Captain Ager in A Fair Quarrel what transgressions his mother may have committed; it is up to him to nullify them by victory in private combat. If he were to lose, the world might think badly of her honor, but if he were to refuse to fight altogether, the honor of each would be irretrievably lost.

Both are under scrutiny at this critical point. Ager's friends expect him to fight. No one considers the possibility that the Colonel's words might be true, and even if they knew Lady Ager to have been guilty of an indiscretion, it would not change their expectations of her son. But Ager, being a truly honorable man, once his wrath cools somewhat, finds his conscience operating under the code of true honor based upon righteousness. He sincerely believes that God will grant him victory only if he is fighting for the truth. More importantly, he believes he will lose his salvation, dying with unrepented sins upon his head, if he were to be slain fighting an illegal duel for an unjust cause. In light of this reasoning, Ager realizes that he cannot fight the Colonel until he is assured of his mother's virtue:

I am too full of conscience,
 Knowledge and patience, to give justice to it;
 So careful of my eternity, which consists
 Of upright actions, that unless I knew

stood the religious significance of Ager's concern for his soul. Stealing vengeance from the hand of the Almighty in a fit of righteous anger was one thing; killing to uphold a lie was another. Like Antigone, Ager must choose between the rules of society and the rules of God, and although he chooses to obey God by refusing to fight, he searches for a way to serve the earthly deity as well. When all the parties are assembled at the duelling ground, Ager's friend plainly summarizes Ager's situation: his entire life's reputation and his future are at stake. If he will not fight, he will appear a dishonorable coward to the others. But Ager stands by his convictions and chooses to explain his actions, or lack of them, with Christian platitudes: "I come with mildness,/ Peace, constant amity, and calm forgiveness,/ The weather of a Christian and a friend." (III,i,70-3) In order to save face, he attempts to solicit an apology from the Colonel, making it clear that he believes the Colonel has wronged him, but that he will be magnanimous and forgiving because he is a devoted Christian friend. Then he repeats the orthodox religious sentiment, held by James I and nearly all Anglican, Puritan, and Sectarian ministers, that duelling violates God's law:

Thousands have made a less wrong to reach hell.
 Aye, and rejoic'd in his most endless vengeance,
 A miserable triumph, though a just one.

Why should men,
 For a poor hasty syllable or two,
 And vented only in forgetful fury,
 Chain all the nopes and riches of his soul
 To the revenge of that, die lost forever?
 For he that makes his last peace with his Maker
 In anger, anger is his peace eternally;
 He must expect the same return again
 Whose venture is deceitful.

(III,i,76-89)

The words reflect lofty sentiments which could have come from a devout minister in a denunciation of duelling. Ager points out that even if a man is justified in his cause, if he dies in the sin of anger, he is damned for that, and he moralizes to the Colonel that both the injured party and the wrongful one should abjure anger and seek reconciliation.

Yet, only a moment later, Ager draws his sword when the Colonel calls him a "base, submissive coward." Because he knows it is a lie, he feels justified in defending his honor in wrath and violence, and he immediately forgets his Christian forbearance as he spits out his challenge: "Oh, heaven has pitied my excessive patience,/ And sent me a cause!/ A coward I was never--Come you back, sir!
 (III,i,112-4) Ager's friend is incredulous at the about-face. "Impossible!" he exclaims. "'Coward' do more than 'bastard?'" It does seem stange that a man of Ager's stature would find it a greater necessity to defend his own honor alone than the combined honor of himself and his

mother. Still, he has found a cause, a reason to fight, and one is tempted to cheer him as he lunges at the Colonel. Jacobean audiences would have been in greater sympathy with him. Not only has Ager refused to ignore the higher code of truth in honor, but now he has a just cause to seek revenge. Also, he now fights under less serious legal and social circumstances than before; he has been insulted beyond endurance, and his sudden rage, or "hot blood" lessens the severity of his crime. Additionally, as Bowers points out, by defeating the Colonel over the second insult, he proves his opponent a dishonorable liar. This would, in effect, negate the first insult as well.²⁰

He wounds the Colonel. As the older man falls, Ager, certain that God has given him aid, remarks, "Truth never fails her servant, sir, nor leaves him/ With the day's shame upon him." (III,i,165-6). He leaves the scene, and immediately the Colonel repents of his insults to Ager with a fervor akin to a religious conversion, thus further elevating Ager as a man of complete valor. But ignorant of the Captain's transformation, Ager still is not satisfied with the day's events. When he discovers that his mother had lied about her own honor to prevent him from duelling, he is not content with her indirect exoneration. He becomes hot to fight the Colonel for the original insult,

and because the Colonel's conversion and lavish praise of Ager has made the young Captain appear the unblemished hero, the audience must support him in this last decision as well. In the end, he comes out fragrant with righteous vindiction and honor. He has refused to fight in an unjust cause, but he has proved himself a man of valor and courage in the defense of a just one. Like a most scrupulous Jacobean gentleman, he is bound to the honor code, never scorning its social mandates, but always maintaining a clear vision of and a strong dedication to its higher meaning.

Yet, Ager's actions are not always easy to understand. His vacillations and his patent insincerity as he mouths Christian platitudes is disconcerting, but perhaps the problem stems from an error in the play rather than in the character. Middleton went to a great deal of trouble to establish Ager as a truly honorable man. He wanted the audience to hold him in high regard and accept his decisions as just ones, but he created his dilemma so artfully that it was nearly impossible to extricate him from it. Ager could not refuse to fight outright; the brand of "coward" would ruin his earthy reputation, his career, and consequently, his honor, which he reveres more than life. To confirm the Colonel's charge would destroy both his and

his mother's honor. And he could not draw his sword against his opponent. He might not have minded dying for the sake of reputation, but he certainly would not place his soul in jeopardy. Middleton gave him the only possible way out, a way acceptable to at least some of the audience members, and if he appears inconsistent, it may be only because Middleton found it impossible to serve both deities simultaneously.

As a member of a relatively elevated social class, Middleton no doubt thoroughly understood and appreciated the social mandates of the honor code. Most likely he accepted them and lived by them as religiously as most high-minded Jacobeans. Yet, he was not blind to the fact that the social code was at best a warped shadow of true honor which circumscribes the behavior of the genuinely virtuous. Like Ager, he must have found discrepancies and conflicts between the ideals disturbing, but he understood that the higher form of honor, based upon Christian temperance, piety, love of truth, and forbearance, combined with chivalric courage, willingness to die for truth and justice, and a concern for personal reputation, far more worthy.

THE SECOND MAIDEN'S TRAGEDY:

The Divine Ideal of Honor

A Fair Quarrel is the only play in which Middleton recognizes the validity of a man's respect for the social honor code. Because Captain Ager lives very much in the temporal world and cares for both his family's reputation and his own, he is forced to accede to society's mandates. The Second Maiden's Tragedy²¹ (1611), written four years prior to A Fair Quarrel, differs markedly in that it does not pay homage to the precepts of the social code. It also addresses the questions of blood revenge and the conflict that arises when different standards of honor clash within a given society, but in this play, these differing standards vary widely. The evil or blind characters live by an extremely perverted code, the good character adheres to a divine ideal. No gray area emerges here--Middleton's vision is youthful and idealistic. True honor ultimately triumphs over evil, destroying it utterly.

J.R. Mulryne has noted the likeness The Second Maiden's Tragedy bears to the medieval morality play.²² Not only do certain characters embody absolutes of virtue or evil, but the names themselves implicitly inform the audience how the characters should be regarded. The Tyrant signifies

lust and greed (one could safely call him dishonorable), and The Lady, the one character he cannot usurp or manipulate, embodies all of the spiritual and physical qualities of perfection. She is the only character who typifies perfect honor, not only as a chaste woman, but also because she possesses all of the honorable "masculine" virtues as well: courage, faithfulness, piety, humility, goodness, and a scrupulous regard for her own honor. In the secondary plot, The Wife personifies what most Jacobbeans considered typical female qualities. She loves her husband, but more in a sexual than spiritual way, and because of her senuous nature, her need to be loved, and her excessive credulity, she has little fortitude against temptation. She does not possess enough moral intelligence to understand the meaning of true, all-encompassing honor, nor the strength to preserve her chastity, which, in her limited sense, she thinks epitomizes honor.

Anselmus, her husband, is obsessed with the notion that The Wife might be capable of unfaithfulness, and like a sick man probing his own ulcer to see if it will bleed, he persuades his friend Votarius to test her virtue. At first Votarius is reluctant because he does not want to insult her by making advances, nor does he want to be responsible for destroying her honor. At their first

encounter, she displays a genuine love for her husband, asking Votarius to persuade him to end his strange, quiet disassociation from her and to return to her bed. From the first interview, Votarius concludes that she is untouchable, but as he, at Anselmus' insistence, spends more time in her company, he falls in love with her and courts her in earnest.

The Wife resists, all the while aware of her own feminine weaknesses. Speaking of honor in terms of reputation rather than virtue, she seems to fear the loss of her good name more than the possible loss of her chastity. After warning her maid not to allow Votarius to bribe her into leaving them alone together, she comments: "There are such things i'th'world, many such buyers/ And sellers of a woman's name and honour." (I,ii,269-70) Later, after she has succumbed to Votarius, she continues to try to protect her reputation, eliciting the help of all her confederates. As Leonella warns her of Anselmus' arrival, she reminds her to dismiss her lover Votarius "if you love your honour," and after Votarius, in a fit of jealousy hints to Anselmus that The Wife might not be inviolate, she reprimands him for marring her good name: "'Tis easy/ To draw a lady's honour in suspicion,/ But not so soon recovered and confirmed/ To the first faith

again from whence you brought it." (IV,i,3-5)

The other characters also are more concerned with the appearance than the reality of The Wife's chastity. Aside from his one jealous blunder, Votarius carefully adheres to a point of honor by defending the reputation of the woman he has seduced. He lies to his friend and goes so far as to take part in a masquerade of deceit to make Anselmus believe his wife is innocent. Anselmus, too, ultimately is more concerned with appearances. As long as The Wife remains faithful to him, he urges Votarius to court her, and he refuses to believe that she will not yield. However, as soon as the deed is accomplished and Votarius's protestations become lies, Anselmus heaves a sigh and believes him. Honor, to all these characters, is but a flimsy veil spun from lies and deception. The villain Belarius succinctly points out what a farce they all have been acting: he calls The Wife an "honourable whore" because she has managed to preserve her good name even though she is an adulteress.

The meaning of honor broadens in the main plot to accommodate a myriad of interpretations. Unlike the characters in the secondary plot, most of the characters here are more concerned with the tangible properties of honor than they are of appearances. Only The Lady,

Christlike in her perfection, love, and understanding, recognizes honor as an essence of goodness; everyone else, especially in the beginning, frankly admit that "honor" means wealth, position, and power. The Tyrant, obsessed with the spirit of acquisition, maintains the most base and perverted sense of honor. He believes he has gained dignity by usurping the rightful ruler, Govianus, and will heap more upon himself by stealing his bride, The Lady. He has become so conditioned by the secular honor code and so seduced by power and the flattery of court sycophants that whatever natural affinity for virtuous honor he may have had in the past has long since atrophied. It is true he loves The Lady, but his love is rooted in baser desires, not in an appreciation of her goodness. He proposes to make her his queen, but she refuses, calling all the titles he has to offer "bastard honours," for she will not abandon her betrothed Govianus for any reason. The Tyrant fails to understand not only her desire to be faithful to Govianus, but more importantly, her refusal of the "honors" of rank and wealth he proffers: "And is our game so crossed? There stands the first/ Of all her kind that ever refused greatness/ A woman to set light by sovereignty!" (I,i,182-4)

His callous ignorance is boundless. He has no

compulsion against asking The Lady's father, Helvetius, to pander for him, and in a sublimely ironic conversation, the two men agree that The Tyrant will heap "honor" upon Helvetius if he will prostitute his daughter. Blindly he believes Helvetius can persuade The Lady to forgo coyness and come willingly to his bed, and he arrogantly asserts that her yielding: "Must come/ Gently and kindly, like a debt of love,/ Or 'tis not worth receiving." (I,i,192-4) He soon discovers that his smugness was premature; she continues to reject him, and he decides to take her by force. But The Lady's virtue is stronger than all The Tyrant's army, for she also thwarts that plan by committing suicide.

Although he considers himself possessed of "goodness . . . grace, and virtue," he is evaluating himself on debased standards of an artificial code. He has no comprehension of The Lady's higher sense of honor which causes her to choose death over defilement. Consequently, he regards her only as the object of his lust; having no sense of her worth as a human being, he cannot honor her in the proper way by respecting her wishes. He even is unable to honor the sacredness of death. Crazed by his loss and his unrequited lust, he exhumes her body and determines to bedizen it "in all the glorious riches of our palace," have it painted to counterfeit life, and possess it in

spite of everything. Her spirit, however, refuses to allow her body to be dishonored by defilement. It visits Govianus to ask him to avenge her and to return her corpse to the sepulchre so that she may find peace. Govianus disguises himself as an artist employed to paint life into her face, and he colors her lips with poisoned cosmetics. After kissing her in a gruesome charade of lovemaking, The Tyrant dies in agony, still ignorant of his own baseness and of the huge gulf which had always separated himself from The Lady.

The Tyrant is the only principal character in the main plot so blinded by the secular trappings of honor that he never understands honor as virtue. Govianus and Helvetius also are inferior to The Lady in the beginning of the play, but they eventually rise to moral awareness through her consummate goodness. Helvetius' transformation is the most dramatic. An old man, he has spent his life as a fawning courtier, willing to prostitute himself as well as his daughter for preferment. Like The Tyrant, he cannot comprehend or appreciate why The Lady refuses to wed or bed so powerful a ruler who would grant her untold wealth and power. His argument that she become The Tyrant's mistress, if not his wife, is marked with an ironic inversion of the differing standards of honor that

he and The Lady possess:

Base-spirited girl,
That canst not think above disgrace and beggary
When glory is set for thee and thy seed,
Advancement for thy father,
.
Thy very seed will curse thee in thy age
When they shall hear the story of thy weakness;
How in thy youth thy fortunes tendered thee
A kingdom for thy servant, which thou lefts
Basely to serve thyself. What dost thou in this
But merely cozen thy posterity
Of royalty and succession, and thyself
Of dignity present?

.
I come
To bear thee gently to his bed of honours.
(II,i,24-7; 43-50; 86-7)

A pistol discharged in his direction and a verbal lashing from Govianus jolts Helvetius into moral awareness. Believing that he had come close to being killed, he realizes that spirituality, not titles or wealth will be honored in heaven, and suddenly he rights his priorities and begins to appreciate his daughter's virtue. No longer content to be The Tyrant's creature, he becomes a frank and courageous spokesman on behalf of genuine honor.

As the former king and beloved of The Lady, Govianus is endowed with a sense of true honor, but he, like Helvetius, reaches a greater appreciation of honor and the responsibilities of those who would attain it. Although he has known and been betrothed to The Lady for some time, he, like the other characters, does not fathom the extent

of her virtue. Initially he believes that earthly honors will seduce her from her vows and to The Tyrant's bed:

O, she's a woman, and her eye will stand
 Upon advancement, never weary yonder;
 But when she turns her head by chance and sees
 The fortunes that are my companions,
 She'll snatch her eyes off, and repent the looking.
 (I,i,63-7)

Although thrilled by her constancy, he comprehends neither the rigorousness of her standards nor the superficiality of his own. Indeed, he continues to think of honor as titles and wealth rather than as virtue, moral courage, or generosity of spirit until after his Lady's suicide. When he discovers that The Tyrant's soldiers are preparing to abduct her for ravishment, he ignores her plight, but mourns his own loss. The men are coming "For thee, my glory,/ The riches of my youth," and when she demands that he kill her before she can be dragged away, he continues to think of himself:

Must I meet peace in thy destruction
 Or will it ne'er come at me?
 'Tis a most miserable way to get it
 I had rather be content to live without it
 Than pay so dear for't, and yet lose it too. (III,i,82-6)

The Lady shows not only greater courage, but greater love as well. She thinks not of herself nor the horrors facing her; her concerns lie with her lord's safety and the loss he will suffer if she is taken to The Tyrant:

Will you be robbed
 And have such warning of the thieves?
 Come on, Sir!
 A resolute captain
 Will rather fling the treasures of his bark
 In to whales' throats than pirates should be
 gorged with't.
 Let me no more be seen. I'm like that treasure
 Dangerous to him that keeps it. Rid thy hands on't.
 (III,i,66-76)

When he lingers too long in his self-pity, she calls upon what she considers the highest appeal she can make: "For honour's sake, dispatch me!" She kneels in prayer and waits for the blow of his sword to send her to heaven, but he is too weak to comply; falling into a faint, he leaves her alone to fulfill one of the most difficult demands of the honor code: to take her own life rather than face dishonor.

When he recovers and finds her dead, Govianus finally comprehends the depths of The Lady's bravery, love, and virtue, and he awakens also to an understanding of what honor requires. To prove this, Middleton allows him to pass a difficult test that The Lady presents to him; her spirit requests that he kill The Tyrant to revenge her body's defilement.

At this point, Middleton pays tribute to the ancient concept of honor based upon the sacred duty of avenging the death or dishonor of a loved one, but he disregards

English literary and social conventions in his methods. While the doctrine of blood revenge was current among Jacobean, playgoers may have been surprised at the methods of revenge Middleton gave Govianus. They would have expected Govianus to slay The Tyrant in an open confrontation, for the English deplored Italianate methods of revenge involving stealth, disguise, and poison. Yet, Govianus employs all these aids and murders The Tyrant without giving him a chance to defend himself. Still, he is certain that his actions are honorable because he is doing what The Lady expects of him: "Had I feared death, I'd never appeared noble/ To seal this act upon me which e'en honours me/ Unto my mistress; spirit. It loves me for't." (V,ii,147-9) And The Lady's spirit, a symbol of divinity, watches the Tyrant's execution and approves: "My truest love,/ Live ever honoured here, and blessed above." (V,ii,163-4)

Traditionally, the revenger in English literature does not survive after he has killed his adversary, even if he has properly followed English conventions. Because his task has been so emotionally arduous, it warps and scars him, rendering him incapable of a normal life. Also the larger question emerges concerning the punishment a man must suffer for breaking the Judeo-Christian law against

personal revenge. Jacobean audiences no doubt sympathized with the heroic revenger and wanted him to succeed, but they understood that he must give up his life in expiation for overriding the rules of God.²³ Yet, Govianus breaks both the religious and English social dictates concerning blood revenge, and he does not die for it; neither does he suffer the mental anguish the obsession for revenge should inflict upon him. Indeed, he becomes so respected by the members of the court that they immediately restore him to the throne. In avenging The Lady, he fulfills the requirements honor has demanded, and this gives him peace.

Like A Fair Quarrel, The Second Maiden's Tragedy pays homage to different and apparently conflicting aspects of the honor code. The protagonists of both plays are dedicated to honor on a spiritual plane; yet, they also seek blood revenge for wrongs done to them. Middleton deviated from convention by allowing Govianus to carry out his revenge by "disreputable" methods and still live, respected by the others, including The Lady. Surely this says something about the playwright's attitude toward the honor code: like many other genteel Jacobean, he maintained a belief in the sacredness of honor from both a Christian and a chivalric standpoint. In The Second Maiden's Tragedy, his earlier play, he idealistically set forth the premise that the two views are compatible, that

even those people who are spiritually pure in the Christian sense can also adhere steadfastly to the sacred dictates of the ancient revenge ethic. However, by the time he wrote A Fair Quarrel, his conviction had tempered somewhat, and he was unable to make the conflicting demands of the two codes mesh as compatibly as before. By the time of his greatest and last (or next to the last) play, The Changeling (1622), he seems to have lost his faith in the ability of human beings to achieve true honor.

THE CHANGELING:

The Debasing of the Honor Code

Rowley also collaborated with Middleton on The Changeling, again taking the responsibility for the secondary plot and leaving the primary plot largely to Middleton. The action in the main plot concerns a young girl, Beatrice-Joanna, betrothed to Alonzo de Piracquo. Before the wedding takes place, she meets and falls in love with another nobleman, Alsemero. Adhering to a point of honor, her new love wants to duel Alonzo for Beatrice-Joanna's hand, but the young lady prefers that Alsemero not risk his life, and she hires a servant, De Flores, to murder Alonzo, thus freeing her to marry Alsemero. De Flores, an ugly, villainous creature, loathed and scorned by Beatrice-Joanna, nevertheless loves her so

madly that he slavishly follows her about, endures her contempt, and hopes for even a disdainful glance from her. Because Beatrice-Joanna's request that he murder Alonzo is couched in sexual innuendo, De Flores believes that if he does as she asks, she will reward him by becoming his mistress. After he has done her bidding she tries to pay him with money, but he blackmails her into surrendering herself. After she marries Alsemero, she bribes her maid Diaphanta into taking her place in the bridegroom's bed on their wedding night so that he will not discover that she has lost her virginity. She also has been forced to counterfeit the proper symptoms of a "test" that Alsemero administers to determine if she is chaste. By this time, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores have become lovers in every sense of the word, and he murders Diaphanta to keep her from revealing the truth about her mistress. Meanwhile, Alonzo's brother, Tomazo, has appeared, seeking revenge for his brother's murder. Eventually all the facts emerge, and De Flores, unwilling to part from Beatrice-Joanna, kills her and then himself, still savoring the deliciousness of her virginal yielding.

All the characters in this plot, including the depraved De Flores, are, as Robert Ornstein says, "absorbed in charades of honour;"²⁴ engrossed with the minutiae of the

social code, they fail to grasp the deeper implications of honor or to cultivate the virtues which signify it. Because Beatrice-Joanna, the most blind and irresponsible of all the characters, has never possessed a strong sense of individual identity, she sees herself only as others see her: a sweet, young girl, incapable of wrongdoing. Because she has been nurtured on aristocratic values and, consequently, on the conventions of the honor code to which her family adheres, she has accepted them as absolutes, even setting them up as false gods which dictate her standard of behavior. Women were not necessarily expected to possess "masculine" virtues such as courage, strength, or a strong sense of individuality or independence, and apparently, Beatrice-Joanna has managed to grow up without becoming fully cognizant of the more significant meanings of honor, either.

She does, however, possess the one virtue absolutely necessary to women who would claim honor: chastity. She publicly refers to it early in the play with a frank candor that may surprise modern audiences, but which makes us aware of its significance in Jacobean society. Since her virginity is considered her most valuable asset, it has become a cherished part of her identity, and when she realizes that De Flores is determined to have it, she

becomes terrified that her one precious possession which embodies her honor will be stripped from her under ignoble circumstances: "Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked./ Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,/ To make his death the murderer of my honour!" (IV,i,120-3) No matter that she has just seduced De Flores into murdering Alonzo so that she can satisfy her romantic whim. As Kenneth Muir has said, she has "no moral sense other than what society has handed her."²⁵

Because Beatrice-Joanna has always been a moral cripple, her "fall" may be a very short one by divine standards, but it is great by the social ones to which she pays homage. Having lost her chastity, her first defense against the possibility of a destroyed reputation, she resorts to the fail-safe her honor system offers--she simply hides her wantonness from the world. She will go to great lengths to prevent Alsemero from finding out the truth. She studies for the test he will administer to determine her chastity; by giving the magical potion to her virginal maid, she learns to gape, sneeze, laugh, and cry when Alsemero gives the same liquid to her. Later she hires Diapantha to take her place on her wedding night. And because De Flores plays the role of "honorable" seducer, even placing himself in jeopardy to protect her good name,

Beatrice-Joanna begins to look upon him with admiration. She declares, "I'm forced to love thee now,/ 'Cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour." (V,i,47-8)

Although Beatrice-Joanna's immoral behavior seems inexcusable, it becomes more understandable when we see how the other "honorable" characters place emphasis upon superficial virtues. Alsemero, one of the play's more sympathetic characters, also is ruled by the social commandments of the honor code and by the revenge and duelling ethic, but he fails to dwell upon the more important moral considerations until after he has learned about Beatrice-Joanna's affair with De Flores and their responsibility for Alonzo's murder. Although ostensibly a lover during the course of the play's action, first and foremost he is a soldier with all the attitudes toward chivalric mandates associated with warriors. Early in the play he complains that a recent military truce has prevented his avenging his father's death. When he discovers that Beatrice-Joanna is already spoken for, with equanimity he proposes to duel Alonzo de Piracquo, taking for granted that it is justifiable to kill a man in illegal combat so that he may claim his betrothed as if she were part of the spoils of battle. Later, he is horrified to discover that Beatrice-Joanna has saved him the trouble of killing

Alonzo by hiring De Flores to do the work. On the other hand, he is not at all perturbed that Tomazo is determined to kill someone to avenge his brother's death.

Alsemero, like Anselmus of The Second Maiden's Tragedy, also is obsessed with the question of his bride's chastity. According to the honor code, a gentleman cannot marry a deflowered lady unless he is the one who has accomplished the deed,²⁶ and consequently, Alsemero is very concerned about the woman he will wed. He thinks Beatrice-Joanna is pure because her innocent beauty make her appear virtuous, but he knows that a man of honor can never be too careful in these matters. He scrutinizes her virtue, even to the point of administering a test which proves only that Beatrice-Joanna has learned how to preserve her honor (reputation) by dissembling. After they have wed, and Alsemero's friend Jasperino convinces him that he should be suspicious of his wife's faithfulness, he proclaims with all the intensity of a man under religious conviction: "Oh, were she the sole glory of the earth./ Had eyes that could shoot fire into kings' breasts,/ And touch'd she sleeps not here!" (IV,ii,105-7)

As unlikely as it may seem, even the repulsive De Flores also adheres to a strict, albeit perverted standard of honor. Although he is a servant in Beatrice-Joanna's

household, surprisingly he is concerned with his own status in society. "I tumbled into th' world a gentleman," he says, complaining that his haughty mistress does not give him the respect to which he is entitled. Like Alsemero, he also wishes to make a good match for himself. Although aware that he cannot marry Beatrice-Joanna, he certainly can simulate the marriage state with her, and he, like all honorable gentlemen, prefers the chaste woman:

And were I not resolv'd in my belief
That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
I should but take my recompense with grudging,
As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.
(III,iv,116-19)

Beatrice-Joanna offends him when she offers money to pay for Alonzo's murder. Expecting her to embrace him with wanton kisses, he bridles at the thought of murdering for wealth, but he feels no dishonor at murdering for the sweetness of Beatrice-Joanna's willing flesh. And when she does yield to him, he strictly adheres to the honor code by protecting her reputation at all costs; without thought for his own safety, he murders Diaphanta and sets her apartment on fire to make sure she will not spread Beatrice-Joanna's guilty secret. And finally, like an honorable gentleman who will take his own life rather than suffer ignobility, De Flores defies his adversaries and commits suicide rather than face the humiliation of

torture. It is odd that a man who possesses so few of the concomitant virtues of true honor--he is without piety, without goodness, and without honesty--should still consider himself a man of honor. Yet, according to the warped and devalued standards society has substituted for true honor, De Flores is not entirely wrong in his estimation of himself. Like Alsemero, he has taken great care to live to the letter of his honor code.

All of the characters in The Changeling are smaller in stature than The Lady of The Second Maiden's Tragedy or Captain Ager of A Fair Quarrel because they live by a set of man-made rules rather than by the spirit of the divine law which governs the universe. For Middleton, human beings become impotent and blind when they ignore God's plan and work out their own moral standards and self-seeking justice. In Tomazo, the would-be avenger in The Changeling, Middleton also shows a different attitude toward the revenge ethic. While in earlier plays he respects man's desire or need to redress wrongs done by means of blood revenge, in The Changeling, he shows that God alone can dispense unerring justice.

Tomazo first appears in the play's action as a rational man, concerned about his brother's safety, and determined to discover what has happened to him. However as he becomes more single-minded in his pursuit of an unknown murderer, he loses control of his mental faculties

and his ability to function as a social being:

I cannot taste the benefits of life
 With the same relish I was wont to do.
 Man I grow weary of, and hold his fellowship
 A treacherous, bloody friendship; and because
 I am ignorant in whom my wrath should settle,
 I must think all men villains, and the next
 I meet, whoever he be, the murderer
 Of my most worthy brother. (V,ii,1-8)

Tomazo's sense of judgment deteriorates rapidly as he becomes more and more obsessed with finding the killer of his brother. Finally he cares not that justice be served; he wants only to experience the satisfaction of killing someone. When Beatrice-Joanna's father, Vermandero, announces that his servants Franciscus and Antonio may be the culprits, Tomazo does not wait for the law to apprehend and try them, but announces that he will dispense "justice" himself: "Like subtle lightening will I wind about 'em./ And melt their marrow in 'em." (V,iii,86-7)

Fortunately for Franciscus and Antonio, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores confess their responsibility for Alonzo's death before Tomazo can lay his hands on them, and caught in their own web of treachery and lust, the two murderers die for their crimes. Had Tomazo relied upon Vermandero's judgment and his own warped sense of justice, he would have murdered two innocent men. At the play's end, we, like Tomazo, are made aware that the orthodox

Christian preacher was right: vengeance does belong to God, and Him alone. While humans are ignorant and weak, God is omnipotent and powerful, capable of seeking out sinners and dispensing perfect justice, and He punishes Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores in a way that no midnight avenger could. If De Flores remains defiant to the end, glad that he had earned Beatrice-Joanna's "honour's prize," he still has enough spiritual insight to understand that he faces eternity in hell. Beatrice-Joanna reaches an understanding of her own moral and spiritual debt that she never would have discovered had she not had to face the enormity of her crimes. "She becomes moral only by becoming dammed," remarked Eliot,²⁷ and that moral awakening pains her far more than a revenger's sword could. In the end, Tomazo says: "I am satisfied; my injuries/ Lie dead before me. I can exact no more." (I,iii,190-1) And well should he be satisfied. God has relieved him of the responsibility of an erring judgement and an empty revenge.

Alsemero also awakens to a higher form of justice and honor at the end of The Changeling because he realizes that the superficial trappings of honor become nothing in the absence of moral rightness and spirituality. "Thou are all deform'd!" he cries to the beautiful Beatrice-Joanna

when he learns of her role in Alonzo's murder; he understands that whatever chastity she may have possessed has little worth housed in a body whose spirit is so foul. Their marriage bed is "a charnel," he says, even before he learns for certain that his wife is an adulteress. At the end of the play we realize that the honor code which the characters revere is inferior to the ancient chivalric code which first defined honor as courage, greatness of spirit, and Christian virtue.

Throughout The Changeling, we see that the most upright characters have based their actions and standards upon a superficial interpretation of the chivalric code. In looking for a wife, Alsemero seeks external beauty and the appearance of chastity rather than a firm moral and spiritual commitment to goodness. Tomazo the revenger does not look to God to see that justice is served; he blindly rages against the world and allows blood thirst to consume him. The base characters ignore absolute values, yet they so effectively adhere to the finer points of the code the others honor that they can commit heinous crimes and still function in their society. Ultimately, we see that their obsessions with social pretensions is a mere charade, even a parody of the magnificent honor code by which the crusading knights lived in their most reverent hours.

In the three preceding plays, Middleton offers a

comprehensive view of the honor code. According to him, true honor is a divine essence which exists most perfectly in those who maintain a balance between Christian and classical ideals. Although these "spiritual" characters rigorously adhere to Christian morality, they do not possess the Christian virtue of humility. Rather, they refuse to suffer injuries inflicted upon them, even seeking blood revenge when their injuries are great. A Fair Quarrel and The Second Maiden's Tragedy attempt to portray characters with these absolute qualities of honor. However, The Lady of The Second Maiden's Tragedy is Middleton's only successful manifestation of those absolutes. Christlike in her goodness and wisdom, she has the clarity of sight and the power to dispense justice. Using Govianus as her instrument, she rids the world of the evil Tyrant, restores order, and simultaneously avenges her own dishonor. More inclined to spirituality, she has rejected the "worldly" concept of honor as reputation and appearances, and consequently, her motives spring from a pure conscience and divine inspiration, not from a desire to look honorable in the world's eyes.

Captain Ager of A Fair Quarrel, however, represents a compromise between worldly and divine honor, and because he tries to adhere to the social as well as divine

standards, he is of lesser mettle than The Lady. In him, Middleton tried to incorporate the disharmonious elements of the social, revenge, and Christian dictates of the honor code into a cohesive philosophy, but he was not entirely successful; trying to embrace them all, he made Ager an inconsistent protagonist. Other characters also face the conflict between divine and worldly criterion of honor. Helvetius and Govianus of The Second Maiden's Tragedy begin as disciples of the social code, but unlike Ager, they eventually reject it in favor of true, or perfect honor. Most of the characters of The Changeling and of the secondary plot of The Second Maiden's Tragedy also glimpse a higher standard, but they are so caught up in the debased and inflexible code that they generally overlook the more important values. Here, even the characters of stature have become small, and because they have neglected to ask for guidance from God, they cannot hope to adhere fully to the demands of the true honor code. Alsemero cannot see that he is living with an adulterous bride, and Tomazo is driven to intemperate blood lust because he overrides divine laws in order to work out his own revenge.

Although The Wife, Alsemero, and Tomazo are inferior to The Lady, or even to Captain Ager, they exist on a

plane above Middleton's most debased characters, De Flores, Beatrice-Joanna, and The Tyrant. These three are so bereft of moral and spiritual fiber that they have completely devalued honor as it was originally conceived. To them, and especially to The Tyrant and Beatrice-Joanna, honor has no basis whatsoever in divine absolutes. Rather, it rests upon appearances only; honor has become nothing more than reputation, power, or wealth.

One of the primary reasons some of the characters examined here have debased their honor is that their desire for sexual pleasure has made them morally and spiritually weak. Because they willfully disregard the Christian injunctions against lust, fornication, and adultery, they divorce themselves from true religion. Instead, they worship a god of carnal love which allows them to indulge their physical desires. The following discussion illustrates how Middleton's Christian viewpoint caused him to consider the religion of love, or the courtly love ideal, a blasphemous ideology.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Michael Foss, Chivalry (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), p. 51.

² Richard Barber, The Knight and Chivalry (Ipswich, Mass: Boydell Press, 1974), p. 47.

³ James I, Political Works, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), p. 281.

⁴ If the wealthier ones wished to become involved, they could buy titles and therefore become members of the elite. Class distinctions were not totally inflexible.

⁵ C.L. Barber, The Idea of Honour in the English Drama, 1591-1700, vol. VI of Gothenberg Studies in English, ed. Frank Behre (Goteberg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1957), p. 139.

⁶ "Honor in his Perfection," quoted in Ruth Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, Studies in Language and Literature, no. 1-2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1929), p. 98.

⁷ However, it could also be earned by extreme valor, regardless of rank or title.

⁸ Kelso, p. 99.

⁹ The Charge of Sir Francis Bacon Knight, His Majesty's Attorney-General, Touching Duels (1614), quoted in Kelso, p. 102.

¹⁰ Sir Fulke Greville, Life of Sir Philip Sidney (1652; rpt., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1652), pp. 65ff.

- 11 Fredson Thayer Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 36.
- 12 Bowers, pp. 38-40.
- 13 Bowers, pp. 16-7.
- 14 C.L. Barber. pp. 13;18.
- 15 The title pages of the original quartos of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, Women Beware Women, The Changeling, and others bear the inscription "Gent" after Middleton's name.
- 16 Samuel Schoenbaum "Middleton's Tragicomedies," Modern Philology, 54 (1956), 16; Havelock Ellis, Introduction to The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists: Thomas Middleton, The Mermaid Series (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1890), p. ix; George R. Price, Introduction to A Fair Quarrel by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), pp. xvi-ii. Other critics agree unanimously as far as I have been able to ascertain.
- 17 Fredson Thayer Bowers, "Middleton's Fair Quarrel and the Dueling Code," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 34, (1937), 40; Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Opposition Drama Under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 114.
- 18 Bowers, "Middleton's Fair Quarrel," p. 43ff.
- 19 Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 50.
- 20 Bowers, "Middleton's Fair Quarrel," p. 63.

21

Because The Second Maiden's Tragedy was registered anonymously, some scholars debate its authorship; Chapman, Massinger, Webster, and Tourner have been suggested as being responsible for it, but most critics, especially modern ones agree that Middleton "almost certainly" wrote it. See Algernon Charles Swinburne, The Age of Shakespeare (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1908), p. 174 Also Schoenbaum, Oliphant, Barker, Frost, Muir, Lancashire, and others believe it is Middleton's on the basis of subject, style, linguistic evidence, matter, and theme.

22

J.R. Mulryne, ed, and introd., Thomas Middleton, Writers and Their Work Series (Wales: A. McLay and Co., 1979), p. 26.

23

Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 185.

24

Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 188.

25

Kenneth Muir, Introduction to Thomas Middleton: Three Plays (Totoway, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p. xiii.

26

C.L. Barber, p. 121.

27

T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays: 1917-1932 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1932), p. 142.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIVINE PASSION:

The Cult of Courtly Love

Sometime just prior to 1150, H. Menhardt, a clerk from the Rhineland, said of the good knight:

A young knight should woo a noble woman, whom one can recognize as such by her noble bearing. He knocks at her door until she opens. He talks with her before the chimney piece; she wants to talk away the sorrow from her heart. Whoever becomes too deeply in love and cannot tear himself away, loses his soul.¹

Love has been a constant theme of literature, delighting poets and their audiences in every age, but during the chivalric Middle Ages, it reached a pinnacle of glorification which it never enjoyed before or since, for during that time it was considered not merely a human emotion, but a spirit so divine that the knights of song and legend were willing to die for merely a glimpse of it.

H. Menhardt's description of the knight in love marks the beginning of a shift in the medieval attitude, not only toward love, but also toward women. Only a few centuries before, the people of Western Europe had never defined passion between men and women as "love." While men might feel affection toward their wives, women were not considered worthy of that higher, purer regard which men reserved for

other men, comrades in arms with whom they could trust their lives and the immediate lords to whom they swore allegiance. Romantic marriages were unheard of. Men arranged marriages for their daughters on the basis of political or economic considerations without consulting them, and many girls became brides to men they had never before met.

Conventional opinion held women intellectually, morally, and physically inferior to men. The Church took an especially misogynistic stance because most of its leaders recognized women as the descendants of Eve and hence "instruments of the Devil."² Church spokesmen also discouraged men from allowing sexual union with their wives to effect an emotional bond with them. The official view according to Gregory at the end of the sixth century was that sexual intercourse had but one legitimate purpose: procreation;³ any desire beyond that was sinful. In the eleventh century, the bishop of Paris, Peter Lombard, said that man's desire for erotic love was a punishment he must suffer because of his fall from grace and such love of one's wife was tantamount to adultery.⁴ Women had few champions prior to the twelfth century, but the rise of chivalry helped to stimulate a new view of women and the affection they were capable of inspiring.

Many influences worked together to elevate the status

of women and to popularize passionate love. Knights who had fought in the Crusades had come in contact with Arabian ideas which glorified lovers and the beauty of women. Some mystical sages who had deviated from orthodox doctrine also chipped away at the Church's anti-feminist structure by treating sexual love sympathetically. In the twelfth century, St. Bernard declared that the love which exists between the sexes can teach humans to love God.⁵ Eventually, even the Church found reasons to soften its attitudes toward women; the cult of the Virgin Mary inspired a new regard for them, and so did the hours of devoted service many women gave to parish churches, orphanages, and other Church institutions.

Women helped to destroy myths about their weaknesses and their congenital wickedness in other ways. When their husbands were absent for long stretches, many ran the households and profitably managed estates. More than a few brave ladies wielded a sword in defense of the castle; some even marched across the desert to fight alongside men in the Crusades.⁶ Neighboring or errant knights visiting their lords' castles found these courageous women noble and beautiful, and although they knew they could never possess them, they found themselves desiring them and their gentle company. But nothing helped to promote the image

of women and the idea of romantic love more than the rise of civilization and learning which took hold of Europe during the twelfth century. Monks and clerks had begun to translate Greek and Roman classics, and the ideas of such philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Zeno, and Ovid slowly spread throughout Europe. From Zeno came Stoicism, which maintained that love must be master of the will and intelligence. Also important to the Stoics was the idea that humans are capable of understanding Absolute Truth by knowledge gained through sensual experience.⁷ Influential, too, was Plato's idea of attaining divine understanding by meditation upon God's perfection. These thoughts, combined with elements derived from mysticism, inspired a neoplatonic cult which asserted that the natural attraction toward beauty is divinely inspired because one must first appreciate temporal glories in order to perceive innate, ideal beauty. Yearning for that beauty was considered a manifestation of man's need to achieve union with his Creator. Since beauty often dwelt in the flesh of women, beautiful and good women became identified as a manifestation or an extension of the Absolute, and from that idea, many men came to believe that carnal desire of a woman led to spiritual improvement.

Perhaps the mutilation of classic philosopher's

ideas came about as a result of the popularity of Ovid. His Art of Love, a ribald satire which mockingly proclaims Eros a god, instructs men how to "worship" properly at the altar of love.⁸ The piece was not meant to be taken seriously, but some did take it so, particularly those who had been exposed to Stoic and Platonic ideas; knights also found in Ovid's work echoes of Arabic ideas with which they had come in contact at the Crusades.

Eventually, these concepts combined to argue that passionate love between the sexes must be seen as a glorious, even divine ideal, and that women who could inspire such love also approached divinity. This new, serious attitude toward sexual love was confined initially to the songs of troubadours, wandering minstrels who had earned their livings by singing Chansons de Gestes (epic songs about the valor of knights in war). But as they began to incorporate themes of romance into their songs, knights, too, came to extol the splendid miseries of love. They found in the poems expressions of the unrequited devotion they had already felt toward the wives of their feudal lords, and they became convinced that their bittersweet yearning ennobled and inspired them to greater courage, wisdom, and fortitude.

During the late twelfth century, Eleanor of Aquitaine

and her daughter Marie of Champagne championed the philosophy, by now called "courtly love" or the religion of love,⁹ and they patronized the troubadours who sang about it. Marie, who especially was interested in the ideal, instituted "courts of love" based upon the rules of feudal vassalage, but here ladies served as lords and masters while men served as vassals who swore allegiance to them. Her favorite poet, Chretien de Troyes wrote, at her command, Lancelot, which portrays the legendary knight as the abject worshipper of his queen, Guinevere. Marie's chaplain, Andreas Capellanus, systemized the rules of courtly love in a textbook, Art of Courtly lovers. In it true love is defined:

Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the embrace of the other.¹⁰

Marie set up rigid standards for courtly lovers. She affirmed that only knights and nobles were capable of communing at the altar of love; the souls of baser-born folk did not have the capacity to encompass fully such magnificent emotions. To the noble lover, the force of his devotion must overwhelm him with tragic force. He yearns for a lady who seems cold and distant at first, but he woos her, for years if necessary, enduring trials

and hardships, even death, for her sake. If eventually, she decides he has attained enough virtue to be worthy, she might favor him with a token, a scarf or some small item. This he immediately attaches to his sleeve because he believes it will bestow strength to his arm, courage to his heart, and nobility to his being. Later, perhaps after several more years, if he has kept himself chaste, noble, and faithful for her, she might grant him larger tokens, and if she so wishes, might even allow him to her bed to share love's sacred rites. However, even if the pair become lovers, they should deny themselves too much physical contact; the god Amour has decreed that the anticipation and suffering caused by abstinence is what gives love its most glorious properties. Tormenting desire and jealous obsession ennoble, but too frequent satisfaction of the flesh debases love. A properly infatuated and love-starved knight supposedly is rendered kind, generous, pious, brave, and gallant by the effects of his lady's magical influence and his poignant obsession with her.

Even though most courtly lovers were emphatically Christian, almost all courtly love precepts were antithetical to basic Judeo-Christian doctrines. One of the most contrary ideas was that true love was always adulterous.

Because marriages were merely political or business arrangements and because wives were still considered little more than the property of their husbands, by the very nature of the institution, no real passion could exist between married people. According to Andreas Capellanus: "Everybody knows that love can have no place between husband and wife. . . . For what is love but an inordinate desire to receive passionately a furtive embrace?"¹²

The ends of marriage were practical: wives performed their duties and bore children; husbands begot those children and provided for their wives. True love had to be given freely, without encumbrances, and without the expectation that it would culminate in marriage. That it was illicit and could possibly end tragically (husbands were not known for tolerating their wives' lovers) made it all the more poignant. Interestingly, while a courtly lover was expected to be radically jealous of other suitors within the convention, he accepted his beloved's sexual duties toward her husband with equanimity, for he understood that while her body may belong to her spouse, a goodly knight might hope to win her heart.¹³

Although theoretically love and its perfecting capabilities were considered the ultimate gift of creation by the Countess Marie and her troubadours, in reality, many

men were far more interested in indulging their carnal natures than in submitting to arduous testing and enforced chastity to elevate their spirits. The courtly love ideal became debased as many used its adulterous and sexual aspects as an excuse for salacious living, and consequently the emphasis upon physical desire as an ennobling force fell into disfavor. New interpretations of Platonic and Stoic philosophies arose which emphasized spiritual love, and idealistic knights and poets began to regard chaste love only as worthy. Reflecting this idea was the troubadour's new type of song, the "Mennesang," which exalted "high love." Especially popular during the first part of the thirteenth century, it celebrated the attainment of the divine through the contemplation of God's highest creation: a lady's goodness and beauty. The new cult was no less blasphemous according to Church doctrine--the lady had simply been removed to a higher, more unattainable position, but she still served as a diety to be worshipped, one who could grant honor and noble qualities to her adorers.

The person most responsible for popularizing this marriage between classical and courtly love ideals was Petrarch (1304-1374), an Italian poet and Humanist, and one of the most influential figures of Western literature. As a young man, he fell in love with a beauty named Laura, and he

immortalized her and his love of her in poems and sonnets which imitated the exaggerated conceits of the courtly love tradition. His poems, however, differed from the songs of the early troubadours in that the love he wrote about was completely chaste. While the courtly lovers had believed their desire for a woman would bring them closer to God, Petrarch was sure that his love for Laura would damn him. Still, he wrote about his over whelming passion and his sorrow and her touching beauty. Petrarch's opinions about the beauty of chaste love were immediately popularized throughout Europe, but they probably reached their peak of influence during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

By the height of the Reformation, the romantic concept had assimilated enough principles from other philosophies to make it fall into step with conventional morality. Poets still wrote about lovers who suffered and faced many perils for their ladies, and they often referred to love in religious terms, but they did not emphasize carnal desire. Nor was the new convention masochistic or adulterous; it became innocent and it always looked forward to marriage.¹⁴ In England especially, adultery and the obsession with sexual yearning were frowned upon, for the pragmatic English,

influenced by Calvin and by middle-class attitudes, preferred to idealize the peaceful harmony that exists between the happily married. This more "wholesome" trend can be seen in many Renaissance plays. Nearly all of Shakespeare's comedies celebrate the triumph of marriage, and Middleton also created lovers who looked forward to conjugal bliss. A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1611-3), The Roaring Girl (1604-8), and Your Five Gallants (1604-6), as well as others, utilize the romance/marriage theme. No doubt the rediscovery of Greek New Comedy fostered an appreciation of innocent young lovers who risk all for marriage, and other literary, religious and social influences helped to shape the new romantic conventions as well. Plato's ideas of a chaste love had already been felt; also of importance was the revival of Aristotelian principles concerning the definition of love. Contrary to Plato's rhetoric which espoused spiritual love, Aristotle's philosophy articulated a regard for a "worldly love" between two people who accept one another as human beings and who make no attempt to deify one another.¹⁵

"Love is ideally a sort of excess of friendship," he wrote, and consequently, he believed that love should be clear-eyed and accepting, pragmatic and sane.¹⁶

Humanism also figured predominately in the shift from courtly to pragmatic, or married love. In the thirteenth

century, Aquinas had already planted the seed which would later flourish. "Love is not a wounding passion, but rather one that preserves and perfects," he said.¹⁷ Other Humanistic ideals elevated women as human beings, not goddesses. For the first time, women were becoming literate; some were well-educated enough to command a practical knowledge of business, literature, and theology which made their husbands regard them as worthy helpmates rather than as property or divinities. Stoic influences also helped to place men and women on a more equal plane. According to Zeno, there is no difference in the virtues and duties of males and females, for souls, not bodies, are important.¹⁸

Calvin's teachings were even more influential in popularizing conjugal love. Women held an important position in middle-class Puritan households, teaching scriptures to the servants and children and working alongside their husbands in business. Spouses spent considerable time together in mutually pleasing activities, and the love that flowered between them was considered a miracle of God, granted as a favor to His obedient servants.¹⁹ The Biblical injunction that men should love their wives was taken seriously, and so were the commandments against fornication and adultery. Even Adam in paradise needed a woman to be completely fulfilled, they reasoned, and unlike the medieval

concept of proper conjugal relations, Calvinistic thought sanctioned desire for one's marriage partner and sexual love as a source of goodly pleasure and satisfaction for both spouses. Phillip Stubbes, an Anglican preacher and ardent Calvinist during the late sixteenth century, referred to married people as "Turtle doves," and asked God to allow him and his wife to "live together in . . . love all the daies of our lives."²⁰

Middleton, like Jacobean Calvinists, believed married love, based upon mutual friendship and affection, superior to courtly love obsessions, and he had no sympathy for lovers so caught up in the ecstasy of their desires that they lose sight of Christian moral principles. In his didactic play, The Phoenix (1602-4), he gives the saint-like hero a speech praising the marriage state:

Mother of lawful sweets, unshamed mornings,
 Dangerless pleasures, thou that mak'st the bed
 Both pleasant and legitimatley fruitful!
 Without thee,
 All the whole world were soiled bastardy
 Thou art the only and greatest form
 That put'st a difference between our desires
 And the disorder'd appetites of beasts,
 Making their mates those that stand next their lusts.
 (II,ii,165-173)

While he often treated adultery in the comic vein, he did not condone it. The adulterous characters in his tragedies always pay for their passion with their lives. Women Beware Women particularly illustrates the fatal

consequences of illicit lust. In three of his comedies, adulterers undergo radical conversions: Whorehound in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside; Sir Penitent Brothel in A Mad World, My Masters (1604-6); and Franciscus in The Widow (1616). Although these plays are comedies, the serious tone of the repentant adulterer in each play may seem jarring. Nevertheless, Middleton does not fail to make his point. In A Chaste Maid, Whorehound, after being nearly fatally wounded in a duel, declares:

Oh, how my offences wrestle with my repentance!
 It hath scarce breath;
 Still my adulterous guilt hovers aloft,
 And with her black wings beats down all my prayers
 Ere they be half way up. What's he knows now
 How long I have to live? oh, what comes then?
 My taste grows bitter, the round world, all gall now;
 Her pleasing pleasures now hath poison'd me,
 Which I exchang'd my soul for.
 (V,i,75-84)

Sir Penitent Brother also repents after having read a book which makes him aware that adultery is a deadly sin:

Accursed man, that stand'st divorc'd from heaven,
 Thou wretched unthrift, that hast play'd
 Thy eternal portion at a minute's game;
 To please the flesh hast blotted out thy name!
 (IV,i,3-6)

Obviously, Middleton could not look sympathetically at the adulterous courtly love ideal. In fact, he often indentifies sexual passion as a kind of madness; it deteriorates its victims to the extent that they commit

heinous crimes but still consider themselves above moral and religious reproach because they have acted for the sake of "love." The Tyrant rapes the body of The Lady in The Second Maiden's Tragedy, and most of the characters in Women Beware Women also sin grievously because they are "in love:" Isabella and Hippolito commit incest, and Bianca, the Duke, and Livia become murderers. A god who will demand such sacrifices, according to Middleton, possesses more demonic than divine qualities.

Middleton was not alone in his condemnation of the adulterous courtly love conventions. Many of the precepts had fallen into disfavor, and marital fidelity and affection became an important theme in Renaissance literature. We can see genuinely loving husbands and wives in Macbeth,²¹ The Dutchess of Malfi, Bartholomew Fair, and Middleton's plays, No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's, (1610-5) and The Old Law, (1616-8). Even in Women Beware Women, (1627) the unholy marriage between the Duke and Bianca is marked by domestic felicity.

The idea that love and affection were necessary in marriage led to a popular belief that young people should have some say in the decision of who they were to marry. Most alliances were still arranged for business or political interests, but few good Renaissance parents forced their

children to marry someone they did not love.²² This, in turn, led to a revival of Greek New Comedy conventions which glorified young, innocent lovers who must outwit parents or guardians trying to match them with the wrong mates. These types of romances, of which Shakespeare was a master, became the closest approximation of the courtly love convention England could offer, but it was very different in many ways from the stories found in the troubadours' songs. But courtly love and Petrarchan ideals continued to exert a powerful influence in literature, particularly in poems and sonnets. Playwrights, too, liked to give their young lovers dialogue which imitated the exaggerated conceits peculiar to the earlier romantic traditions. Also, as in the case of many hackneyed trends, the conventions of courtly love and Petrarchan poetry were frequently parodied.

Middleton also used themes and conventions from the romantic traditions, but he never glorified the standards of the early courtly love ideal. Those characters who do make love their religion or fall into an adulterous liaison he either satirized or condemned. His true lovers are religious in the Christian sense, and because they ask God to sanction their love, they are all the more steadfast and loving. In Middleton, love as agape elevates; love

as eros debases and destroys. In three plays, The Family of Love (1602), The Changeling (1622), and The Second Maiden's Tragedy (1611), he explores a variety of faces of the courtly love traditions, and in each one he views romantic ideals from a different perspective. Through each of them we can see that the only kind of love worth sharing is one based upon mutual respect and sanctified by the Christian God.

THE FAMILY OF LOVE:

Middleton's Parody of Courtly Love Conventions

Critics have debated Middleton's intent in the creation of the romantic lovers, Gerardine and Maria, in The Family of Love. Richard Levin asserts that the pair are true lovers who epitomize "love's loftiest expression."²³ He says their relationship is placed "far above the sordid worlds" of the other plots, "both in the . . . elevation of the verse and diction, and in the sentiments expressed."²⁴ Clifford Davidson and Anthony Covatta agree that Middleton wanted to portray Gerardine and Maria as sympathetic characters, but Covatta finds them inconsistent, and he blames this on Middleton's faulty workmanship.²⁵ Levin, too, is unimpressed with the playwright's skill in his creation of the lovers, and admits that much of their

romantic dialogue seems "obvious" and "quite clumsy."²⁶ Other critics, however, consider the exaggeration and the incongruities intentional on Middleton's part. J.W. Olive and Baldwin Maxwell assert that the action is a parody of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.²⁷ Indeed, one may recognize many similarities between the Geradine and Maria plot and Shakespeare's tragedy. In the first act, Maria and Gerardine share a balcony scene similar to Romeo and Juliet's, and much of the dialogue seems to imitate Shakespeare's lyric style. Notice, however, the difference in tone in passages from the two plays. The friar in Romeo and Juliet begins a scene with: "The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,/ Check'ring the Eastern clouds in streaks of light." (II,iii,1-3) In The Family of Love, Purge also opens a scene describing the early morning: "The grey-eyed morn braves me to my face and calls me sluggard," (II,i,1) and Glister echoes: "The tedious night is past and the jocund morn looks more lively and fine than an old gentlewoman's glazed face in a new periwig." (II,i,24)

John McElroy, however, believes Middleton was doing more than parodying just Shakespeare's famous lovers; he avers that the entire Gerardine and Maria plot is a burlesque of all romantic conventions.²⁸ This seems more likely. In many ways, Middleton's lovers are similar to

conventional English Renaissance romantic comedy couples. Young and enthusiastically in love, they wish to marry, but are thwarted by Maria's uncle, Glister, who dislikes Gerardine. Yet, because they are not as innocent or appealing as most young lovers based upon English romance conventions, they seem to be caricatures who are ludicrously in love with love and their own poetic eloquence.

In order to intensify his satire against them, Middleton has given Gerardine and Maria characteristics drawn from the romantic convention's earliest roots, and consequently, they appear as much a parody of courtly lovers as English romantic couples. Like the knights and ladies of the Countess Marie's court, Gerardine and Maria proclaim love as their religion. Before the first thirty lines of dialogue, Maria has already established her attitude toward romance:

'Tis blasphemy
'Gainst love's most sacred deity, to ask
Why we do love, since 'tis his only power
That sways all our affections; all things which be,
Beasts, birds, men, gods, pay him their fealty.
(I,i,18-22)

Later, Gerardine repeats the same sentiment:

Thou sacred deity, Love!
Thou Power predominate, more to be admir'd
Than able to be exprest, whose orb includes
All terrene joys which are! all states which be
Pay to thy sacred throne, as tribute-fee,
Their thoughts and lives. Like Jove's, so must thy acts

Endure no question: why, thy hidden facts
 The gods themselves obey: heaven-synod holds
 No gods but what thy awful power controls.
 (IV,ii,1-9)

Middleton gave courtly-love language to characters in other plays as well, and nearly always these characters are portrayed unsympathetically. In A Game At Chess, the Black Bishop's Pawn, an evil lecher who lusts for the White Queen's Pawn, speaks of the object of his desire in religious terms. He says he will:

 by degrees approach the sanctuary
 Of unmatched beauty set in grace and goodness

 The holy dew of prayer lies like pearl
 Dropped from the opening eyelids of the morn
 Upon the bashful rose. (I,i,72-3;78-80)

The Tyrant in The Second Maiden's Tragedy also observes rites of courtly love; he commands his soldiers to kneel to The Lady's body and kiss the ground before her. He, too, kneels, and he speaks to her corpse as if she were possessed of ethereal qualities:

O, the moon rises! What reflection
 Is thrown about this sanctified building
 Madam! 'Tis I, sweet lady, Prithee speak!
 'Tis thy love calls on thee--thy king, thy servant.
 (IV,iii,80-1;86-7)

While Middleton's evil or misguided lovers frequently adhere to courtly love conventions and speak in elevated language, his sympathetic lovers talk to one another straightforwardly and show their love by their actions

rather than in high-flown verse. Never do they speak in a language similar to the exaggerated dialogue peculiar to Gerardine and Maria. Fitsgrave of Your Five Gallants (1604-6) is one of the most attractive lovers to be found in the Middleton canon; his speeches to his beloved Katherine are plain and honest, bereft of exaggerated metaphors or references to deities. Only once does he wax poetic, and even in his most ecstatic moment, he sounds more level-headed than Gerardine:

In you is plac'd the worth that I respect.
 Unequall'd virgin, from your servant's arm
 Vouchsafe this worthless favour to accept,
 The hallow'd beads, whereon I justly kept
 The true and perfect number of my sighs.
 (Gives chain of pearls)

(I,ii,19-23)

In The Roaring Girl, the equally sympathetic lovers Sebastian and Mary do not speak romantically to one another at all. They state their lover matter-of-factly and get down to the business of working out a plan to trick their parents into letting them marry. The dialogue of Maria and Gerardine, by contrast, appears superfluous and comical in its excess of overused Petrarchan conceits and commonplace similes. In a typical speech, Gerardine describes his beloved:

T'enjoy a creature,--whose dishevell'd locks
 Like gems against the repercussive sun,
 Gives light and splendour, whose star-like eyes
 Attract more gazers' love to see them move

Than the Titanian god, when AEgean's hill
 'A mounts in triumph; a skin more pure and soft
 Than is the silk-worm's bed; teeth more white
 Than new fall'n snow or shining ivory
 Is happiness sought by the gods themselves.
 Celestial Venus, born without a mother,
 Be thou propitious! thee do I implore,
 Not vulgar Venus, heaven's scorn and Mars his whore.
 (IV,ii,89-100)

The last couplet is reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnet 130,
 "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." While the
 conventional Petrarchan poem finishes with a lofty sentiment
 expressed in rhymed couplet, Gerardine's speech is full
 of flourishes and trills, and then it debases the idealistic
 verse with the last line.

Maria's alliance with Gerardine also seems to be more
 a parody of the courtly love tradition than a true
 Renaissance young-love relationship. Because chastity
 between unmarried or unbetrothed lovers had come to play
 an important part in the English romantic convention, the
 sweethearts in most contemporary plays waited until their
 relationship was solemnized by vows before they consummated
 their love. Gerardine and Maria pay lip service to the
 custom of premarital chastity, but in reality, they, like
 the more carnal medieval courtly lovers, regard sexual
 love as one of the most important aspects of their relation-
 ship.

According to both Gerardine and Maria, Maria is

"truly virtuous." Early in the play she praises "modest thoughts" which "tend to honour'd nuptuals . . . far from impure thoughts." (II,iv,9-16). Gerardine sighs to Lipsalve and Gudgeon, "My love's chaste smile to all the world doth speak her spotless innocence," (I,ii,155-6) but despite her virginity and her "show of niceness," she remains a passionate creature. This speech, couched in courtly love language, reflects an attitude somewhat more lascivious than proper for a restrained lady whose love is noble and pure:

'bove those joys
Which lovers taste when their conjoined lips
Suck forth each other's souls, the earth, the air,
Yea, gods themselves, know none. Elysium's sweet,
Ay, all that bliss which poets' pens describe,
Are only known when soft and amorous folds
Entwine the corps of two united lovers,
Where what they wish they have, yet still desire,
And sweets are known without satiety.

(II,iv,33-41)

During their first balcony scene, Gerardine gazes up at Maria in her chamber window, and she plays the role of a lady in the grip of true love; tossing down a token, she asks Gerardine to wear it as "my true love's pledge." Although he has made no attempt to reach her, she implores him not to risk climbing up to her room; yet her warnings also carefully instruct him how it may be done:

I prithee, love, attempt not to ascend
My chamber-window by a ladder'd rope:
Th' entrance is too narrow, except this post,
Which may with ease,--yet that is dangerous:
I prithee, do it not.

(I,ii,136-40)

When he finally does gain access and requests his lover's reward, she scolds his impudence, but before he has the chance to ask again, she changes her mind and heartily agrees to accept him.

Gerardine, too, is less than a model of chastity. He jokingly comments to Dryfat the Familist, "I never make my neighbor a cuckold for any hate or malice I bear him, but in love and charity to his wife." (IV,ii,74-5) When he and Maria finally manage to be alone together, he immediately announces that his "blood's on fire" and suggests that they find a way to quench it. Undaunted by her equivocation, he merrily rattles off a ditty that sounds more like Ovid than a "true" lover:

Ger: Amore: take A from thence,
Then more is the perfect moral sense,
Plural in manners, which in thee do shine
Saint-like, immortal, spotless, divine.
Take M away, ore is beauty's name
Craves an eternal trophy to thy fame:
Lastly, take O, in re stands all my rest,
Which I, in Chaucer-style, do term a jest.

Mar: You break all modest bounds; away, away!

Ger: So when men come behind do woman say.

Mar: Come, come I say--

Ger: Ay, that's the word indeed. (III,ii,48-58)

Because Maria's uncle Glister forbids her to marry Gerardine and even keeps her locked in her room so that

she cannot see him, they are placed in the same position as medieval courtly lovers: an authority figure serves as an obstacle to their union, and Gerardine, like the knights of old, must be tested before he can embrace his lady. He overcomes the obstacles by his wit; on the pretext that he has sailed away to another country, he locks himself inside a trunk which ostensibly contains all his earthly goods. It is delivered to Maria's room, and when he emerges and they have stolen a secret kiss, it is all the sweeter because their love, tried by hardship, has become more powerful:

Mar: I thought thou had'st been cabin'd in thy ship,
Not trunk'd within my cruel guardian's house.

Ger: That cruelty gives fuel to desire;
For love suppress'd fares like a raging fire;
Which burns all obstacles that stop his course
And mounts aloft.

(II,iv,251-5)

Since Gerardine has now proved himself worthy, he wins Maria's total commitment. She takes him to her bed, but he still has to pay his lover's dues. To avoid detection, he stays locked in the trunk for many days, coming out only for tender, brief moments with his beloved. Eventually, Maria becomes pregnant, and Gerardine hatches a plot to force Glister to let them marry. They convince the old man's wife that Glister has impregnated Maria, and in the end, he is so anxious to be rid of her and her unborn

child that he not only agrees to let her marry Gerardine, but he spices the arrangement with a thousand pounds as a dowry.

All the trials that the pair have suffered are ultimately rewarded, as they are in most Renaissance romantic comedies. Yet, despite the tone of their language and sentiments, Gerardine and Maria appear ludicrous compared to most Elizabethan or courtly lovers. The image of the hero stuffed in a small trunk, emerging occasionally to bill and coo about his "sacred" love seems rather ludicrous compared to the arduous trials Lancelot overcame to win Guinevere.

Other characters in The Family of Love serve to undercut the romance of Gerardine and Maria. Not once do the pair share a tender moment entirely alone; they are always interrupted by one or both of the two farcical libertines, Gudgeon and Lipsalve, who constantly mock, imitate, or criticize the lovers. During the first balcony scene, while Gerardine and Maria are crooning hyperbole to one another, Lipsalve and Gudgeon are snickering, whispering bawdy asides, and generally denigrating women and their lovers. A few scenes later, in the midst of Gerardine's attempts to seduce Maria, Lipsalve shows up beneath Maria's balcony with his page, disguised as

Gerardine and seeking a way to enjoy her himself. Maria, aware that he is an imposter, plays the game with him, and they unconsciously parody the sentiments that had been spoken in the earlier scenes. However, their dialogue does not sound any more ridiculous than the ones that have already taken place between the real lovers:

Lip: Boy, I have spied my saint.

Shr: Then down on your knees.

.

Mar: Whom do I see? O how my senses wander!
 Am I not Hero? art not thou Leander?
 (III,ii,29-37)

Lipsalve and Gudgeon serve in other ways to undermine the image of the romantic lovers. While these two gallants constantly berate women and romance, they actually behave very much like courtly lovers on a debased level. Conjugal union they treat with disdain, but they are enraptured with the thoughts of having affairs with all the unavailable women in the play. Gudgeon says Mistress Purge "makes civil wars and insurrections in the state of my stomach," (II,iii,157-8) and Lipsalve also suffers from the torments of passion. He moans, "I have a fire in my liver burns like hell." (II,iii,103) Like knightly lovers of old, they seek after "love" as if it were as essential as religion. Lipsalve says love is his "vocation," and that

"love's as proper to a courtier as preciseness to a puritan." They also endure pain and hardships in the hopes of winning their lady, Mistress Purge, but their pain degrades rather than ennobles them. Each, thinking that the other is a spirit who will conjure up Mistress Purge if it is whipped enough, thrashes the other soundly while screaming Latin gibberish, hoping mightily that they will soon find a reward of love awaiting them.

Surely Middleton intended to satirize the courtly love convention with Gerardine and Maria just as he intended to satirize the Family of Love sect in the Familist plot. While the young lovers appear more innocent than Rebecca Purge, they are nevertheless hypocritical and heretical, as she is: they substitute the religion of love for true religion and use it to justify their lust. Middleton could not condone this, and although he mocked them lightheartedly, he did not want to present them as models of "true love." Rather, they are comic victims of Eros. Having made romantic lust their god, they ignore morality and spirituality and allow themselves to become obsessed and debased by carnality.

THE CHANGELING:

The Dark God Eros

Although Middleton did not approve of the foolish Gerardine and Maria, he treated them more gently than he treated other characters who are caught up in the excesses and transgressions afforded by the courtly love cult. In The Changeling, he also created lovers out of a romantic tradition, not merely laughable in their superfluities, but also perverse and willfully carnal. To them love is not an "excess of friendship," nor a joyous miracle which renders them excessively poetic; it is a dark and driving force which leads them to death and damnation.

Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are lovers who sacrifice their souls on the altar of "love." Their complex relationship has been called "Petrarchan,"²⁹ but actually its physical nature makes them more akin to courtly lovers. Middleton appropriately drew them from that tradition because it allowed him to explore fully the religious implications and to show their sins as inversions of the Christian ideal. Many critics have already pointed out the parallel of the destruction of paradise by the devil's serpent (De Flores) and the temptress Eve (Beatrice-Joanna).³⁰ While set in the framework of Middleton's Christian vision, that analogy certainly is valid. However, the playwright intended that

his lovers Beatrice-Joanna and DeFlores should attempt to set themselves apart from Christian convention, to look to a false god which leads them through a "paradise" of depravity. They become so involved with their worship of Eros and the black magic of obsessive carnal desires that they lose their souls.

Two courtly-love triangles exist within the action of the main plot. The first, between Beatrice-Joanna, Alonzo, and Alsemero, seems characteristically poignant by courtly love standards. Alsemero's and Beatrice-Joanna's love is adulterous in the strictest sense of the word because, to Jacobean audiences, her betrothal to Alonzo would have been tantamount to marriage. Because the lovers are chaste, and because they express their affection for one another in religious terms, their love seems sweet, even sad. Act I, scene i opens with Alsemero observing: "'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her. . . . The place is holy, so is my intent;/ I love her beauties to the holy purpose." (I,i,1-6) Beatrice-Joanna has reacted to Alsemero, her new "saint," in a similar way: "I have within mine eye all my desires;/ Requests that holy prayers ascend heaven for." (II,i,7-9) However, this idyllic beginning soon turns sour as Beatrice-Joanna plots to murder Alonzo so she can marry Alsemero. This action

sets the stage for Beatrice-Joanna to enter into yet another, but far less romantic, courtly-love liaison with De Flores. Their situation is typically gallant; as her servant, De Flores has long worshipped Beatrice-Joanna from afar, and although she has always scorned him, he preserves, seeking every opportunity simply to gaze upon her and to do her some small service.

Two powerful scenes in The Changeling play out a masque of distorted courtly love ritual. In act II, scene ii, De Flores kneels before his haughty mistress, quivering with desire and overjoyed that she has looked kindly at him. He begs her to allow him the honor of committing murder for her, and thus damn his soul for her sake. In act III, scene iv, De Flores returns to announce that he has made himself worthy of her "honour's prize." He gives her a token, a diamond ring which had once graced the finger of her now-dead betrothed, and then accepts it back again. Then he demands his ultimate reward, love for the service of love; and having no choice, Beatrice-Joanna is forced to become his mistress in both senses of the word.

Like the conventional courtly lover, De Flores "earns" his lady's heart through his devoted service and his "merit," and in the end, when he knows they are both doomed, he dies uttering a typically gallant sentiment: "I would not go

to leave thee far behind." (V,iii,176) He fully expects their souls to merge in the afterlife, but although there will be spirital union for them in the Platonic sense, they will find it in hell, not in heaven. That is fitting, not only because they have defied the commandments against adultery and murder, but because they have chosen to worship at the altar of the dark god, Eros. The underworld is the place where their spirits will be most at home.

It might not seem appropriate to compare the servile De Flores with the magnificent Faustus, but like the legendary tragic figure, De Flores sacrifices his connection with the moral and spiritual world of the Christian God for carnal fulfillment. Early in the play it is obvious that he has been obsessed with Beatrice-Joanna for some time prior to the beginning of the action. "I must see her still," he says. "I shall have a mad qualm within this hour again." (II,i,78-9) Later, he again reveals how his desire for her tortures him: "Whatever ails me? Now a late especially/ I can as well be hanged as refrain from seeing her." (II,i,27-8) Since he has already given up his soul in adoration of her, it follows logically that he should go a step further and commit the ultimate crime, murder, in order to win her. He is aware of the consequences of his actions; after he has murdered Alonzo, he

refers to his blighted conscience, and he, not Beatrice-Joanna, feels guilty when the presence of Tomazo, Alonzo's brother, reminds him of his crime. Still, he believes that the possession of Beatrice-Joanna is worth perdition because his passion for her has driven him to his own personal hell from which he can never hope to escape without tasting her flesh.

When Beatrice-Joanna decides to hire him to murder Alonzo, she thrills him by speaking to him kindly for the first time since he has known her, and when she actually touches the pimpled face that she had cursed shortly before, he can hardly contain his excitement: "Ha, I shall run mad with joy!" (II,ii,70) When she tells him she wants to be rid of Alonzo, he kneels, begging to do her the service of murder, and when she agrees to grant him that dubious honor, promising him "Thy reward shall be precious," he leaps to his chore, certain that her "love" will be the reward of his service:

Oh my blood!
Methinks I feel her in mine arms already,
He wanton fingers combing out this beard,
And, being pleased, praising this bad face.
(II,ii,147-50)

Willingly, De Flores sacrifices all for lust. He does not regret losing his reputation, his life, or even his soul for Beatrice-Joanna, because he knowingly chooses to honor

Eros instead of Jehovah. Beatrice-Joanna makes the same sacrifices, but being less morally and spiritually intelligent than De Flores, she does not understand that Jehovah is a jealous God who will damn her for idolatry.

Over the years, Beatrice-Joanna has generally fared much better with the critics than the obviously wicked De Flores. Samuel Schoenbaum describes her as "weak and impulsive,"³¹ and Una Ellis-Fermor saw her as a "spoilt child."³² However, of late, critics have not allowed her seeming helplessness obscure the fact that she really is "a creature of evil"³³ who willfully seduces De Flores into doing her dirty work for her. Because in the beginning Beatrice-Joanna is an innocent, she looks at love from a romantic perspective. Like any love-struck teenager, she croons courtly love melodies, believing that her love for Alsemero is more important than anything or anyone in the world. While self-indulgent romanticism usually is excusable because it is harmless, Beatrice-Joanna's willfulness leads her to murder so she can fulfill her romantic fantasies.

Her speeches to Alsemero nowhere indicate that she harbors sexual desire for him, but her obsessive hatred of De Flores both masks and reveals a fascination bordering on, if not actually, the erotic. Robert Ornstein has observed that from the beginning, Beatrice-Joanna has felt an affinity for De Flores, for she realizes that "only through

him could she satisfy that craving for romantic experience which is fulfilled in the breathless adventure of murder and adultery."³⁴ Joseph Duffy declares that Beatrice-Joanna has a "remarkable sensuality" and a "sexual rage" against De Flores.³⁵ J.L. Simmons agrees, adding that she is "obsessed with sex" and "wants total abandon in naked sexuality."³⁶ Indeed, her intense hatred for De Flores appears to be the obverse of sexual fascination. He is ugly, but apparently not as repulsive to the other characters as she declares he is to her. His touch is so disturbing that she cannot wear a glove whose mate he has touched, and she cannot bear to be in his presence; when she is, he devours her with his eyes and trembles with a "mad qualm." She sees, at least subliminally, how much he hungers for her, and even though she may not be aware of it, such hunger has its own attractiveness. She fears not De Flores' ugly face, but his sexual power, to which her "blood" responds long before her conscience does.

In the scene where she hires him to murder Alonzo, she either instinctively or purposefully plays upon his desire. She touches him, sighs his name, and couches her request in innuendo which deludes him into believing he can earn her "love:"

Hardness becomes the visage of a man well,
It argues service, resolution, manhood.

If cause were of employment.

.

Oh, my De Flores! We shall try you.

(II,ii,92-4;98-99)

Gorley Putt agrees that she consciously appeals to his baser passions, "deliberately playing with fire" and signaling to De Flores "that she will 'love the thing she fears.'"³⁷ The scene builds to a breathless climax when Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores excitedly anticipate Alonzo's death:

Beat: Then take him to thy fury!

DeFl: I thirst for him.

Beat: Alonzo de Piracquo!

DeFl: His end's upon him; he shall be seen no more
and then is resolved by a woman satisfied and grateful:

Beat: How lovely now dost thou appear to me!
(II,ii,133-6)

Perhaps some critics have been lenient with Beatrice-Joanna because she is so effective a rhetorician. Her most characteristic quality is that she wants to have her way and experience the thrill of forbidden fruit without having to accept responsibility; in order to evade blame, she has learned to shift it to others. She does not want to be accountable for murdering her betrothed herself, but she can put the burden on De Flores' shoulders. When her sins finally are revealed, she blames her fall on De Flores,

completely ignoring the fact that she had tempted him and asked him to kill Alonzo. Moreover, when De Flores demands her virginity as a reward for his services, she becomes caught up in what Paula Johnson calls "a rape-fantasy objectified, enacting the covert wish for pleasure without blame."³⁸ Here again, she manipulates words to make herself appear the innocent victim, but her actions betray her "blood," and De Flores knows her well enough to understand that her fearfulness is mixed with anticipation: "'Las, how the turtle pants! Thou'lt love anon/ What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on.'" (III,iv,170)

Indeed, she does learn to "love anon." Once De Flores has initiated her into pleasure, she becomes as carnal as he is. She even takes foolish chances to be with him: Japerino overhears them in the room next to Diaphanta's, and on the night of her wedding to Alsemero, she couples with De Flores while she waits for Diaphanta to leave Alsemero's bed. In the course of only a few days, she learns to "love" De Flores, his "service" having quite endeared him to her: "How heartily he serves me! His face loathes one,/ But look upon his care, who would not love him? The east is not more beauteous than his service." (V,i,70-3) Beatrice-Joanna is not merely a sacrifice on Eros' altar; she has begun to worship there as well. Her

natural desire for the romance, pleasure, and excitement love's religion offers has caused her to reject the principles of true religion: she is "fated" to embrace carnality and to align herself with De Flores, whose nature is as sensual as her own.

Like the lovers who graced Marie of Champagne's court, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores consider "love" an absolute, and they singlemindedly try to attain it at all costs. But Middleton was not a troubadour; he could not accept the idea that human desire is divine, or that those who make a religion of love are ennobled by it. To him, Jehovah alone is "love;" Eros is His anthesis. When lovers choose to deify Eros, they are committing heresy, and they become vulnerable to his debasing and destructive power. Middleton satirizes this heresy in the Family of Love. Gerardine and Maria allow their devotion to Eros to supercede devotion to God, and he make fools of them. In The Changeling, however, the same heresy damns Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores and ruins the lives of the people around them because it leads them to commit unforgivable crimes.

THE SECOND MAIDEN'S TRAGEDY:

Love's Expression Through the Body and the Soul

Although Middleton rejected the adulterous and idolatrous kind of devotion found in the courtly love ethic, he did not disavow all its precepts. In his most idealistic play, The Second Maiden's Tragedy, he established spiritual love as a paragon which ultimately is superior to all other forms of love between the sexes. Here he also explored the dual nature of love. On one hand, it is a divine spirit which elevates and purifies, and, on the other, it is a destructive power which degrades and destroys. In the primary plot, the relationship between the Lady and Govianus is based upon the Platonic ideal which triumphs over carnality and worldly values. In the contrapuntal subplot, The Wife and Votarius allow themselves to be seduced by Eros, the god of passion, and they ultimately become sacrifices to him.

The relationship between Govianus and The Lady, based upon a union of spirits rather than upon desires of the flesh, in many ways represents a perfect expression of the late courtly love tradition. Although they have lived together in close confinement, and Govianus' page refers to The Lady as Govianus' "wife," (IV,iv,24)³⁹ their relationship is uncluttered by passion. Govianus himself

twice comments on her virginal state.⁴⁰ No obsession, no aching desires impede their "marriage of true minds." However, this pair differs from ideal thirteenth century lovers in that their relationship is not idolatrous. Rather, it is sanctified by the Christian God. If Govianus treats his Lady as a saint, it is not because the love they share seems to him a divine essence, but because she actually approaches spiritual perfection. From the beginning she has dwelt more in the spiritual than the physical world, rejecting all earthly glories in favor of the simple harmony she shares with Govianus: "'Tis not titles/ Nor all the bastard honours of this frame/ That I am taken with." (I,i,125-6). When The Tyrant asks her to become his queen, she refuses, proclaiming that if "all the kingdoms of the earth were his [The Tyrant's] own . . . I would not change this misery for that septré." (I,i,168-71)

At the point of her death she kneels in prayer, no doubt looking forward to the glories that will be awaiting her in heaven, and at her spirit's return, we can see that indeed she has been honored by God. Middleton's description of her spirit in the stage directions not only patently imitates the Biblical account of Christ's resurrection, but also symbolically shows the heavenly honors bestowed upon her:

On a sudden, in a kind of noise like a wind, the doors clattering, the tombstone flies open, and a great light appears in the midst of the tomb; his LADY, as went out, standing just before him all in white, stuck with jewels, and a great crucifix on her breast. (IV,iv)

Govianus also shows a disregard for temporal honors. After he has discovered that his Lady will not abandon him for The Tyrant's bribes, he is unperturbed by the thought of imprisonment, for he, too, prefers pure, simple love to "honor:" "If there be man/ Above a king in fortunes, read my story/ And you shall find him there! Farewell, poor kingdom." (I,i,131-3) However, less wise and spiritually perfect than The Lady, he stands to learn from her. At first, she alone understands that heaven is a real place where they will live after they have shed their superfluous bodies:

I am like one
Removing from her house, that locks up all,
And rather than she would displace her goods.
Makes shift with anything for the time she stays.
(III,iii,134-7)

She is determined to die rather than to allow rape to pollute her love, and although Govianus understands the reasons for her choice, he cannot understand that her death will not mean they will be lost from one another forever. "Must I lose thee then?" he cries, and she reminds him that love is always greater than death:

Th' are but thine enemies that tell thee so.
His lust may part me from thee, but death, never;

Thou canst not lose me there, for dying thine,
 Thou dost enjoy me still. Kings cannot rob thee.
 (III,iii,143-6)

Not until her spirit visits him and converses with him does Govianus realize that love transcends death; then his joy in his new knowledge is so great that his first impulse is to kill himself so he can join her. However, he recognizes that he must first fulfill his obligation to avenge her body's defilement, and when he does meet that requirement, and her spirit visits once again to express her eternal devotion, he finally understands that the door to death is not a barrier to love, but that he and The Lady can continue to love one another whether he dies or remains alive. This knowledge gives him greater spiritual contentment than he has ever known before. As The Tyrant lies dying, he condemns Govianus to death just as he earlier had condemned him to prison. However, having experienced his apocalyptic conversation with The Lady's spirit, Govianus' peace remains unclouded:

Doom me, Tyrant.
 Had I feared death, I'd never appeared noble
 To seal this act upon me, which e'en honours me
 Unto my mistress' spirit. It loves me for it.
 (V,ii,146-9)

In the end, he chooses to live because he understands that he can love his Lady and be loved by her no matter where their respective spirits dwell. The spirit of The Lady agrees. "My truest love," she tells him, "live ever

honoured here and blessed above." (V,ii,163-4)

The relationship between Govianus and The Lady is characterized by inner peace and divine perfection, fully approved of by God, and they experience nothing but triumph over evil, both in life and death. However, the adulterous lovers Votarius and The Wife have no such divine assurances, for they understand from the beginning that their passion is a destructive force which creeps in and usurps the will and moral values. The relationship between The Wife and Votarius bears little resemblance to the spirit of even the carnal aspects of medieval courtly love. Because they reside in the world of Renaissance English Christianity, they cannot fully embrace the courtly love convention and allow themselves passion without guilt. Also, since they do not understand unfulfilled yearning as an elevating force, they cannot refrain from giving in to their lust. As a consequence, their adultery is not ennobling, but debasing; they do not gain strength, but lose it to the dark force of carnality.

The Wife understands Eros as a powerful god who cannot be lightly regarded, and aware of her own moral weakness, she pleads with Votartius to stop his attempts to seduce her: "What is't to you, good sir, if I be pleased/ To weep myself away, and run thus violently/

Into the arms of death, and kiss destruction? (I,ii,146-8)
 Then she enlists the aid of Leonella, her waiting woman,
 to help her avoid temptation, but her situation has already
 become hopeless because her defenses have shattered.

"Somewhat commands me," she says like a woman sleepwalking,
 "and takes all the power/ Of myself from me!" (I,ii,274-5)

Votarius, considering himself a man possessed of
 strong morals, does not feel so defenseless. He calls Eros
 "a fond, young boy," (I,ii,236) and calls upon his own
 strength to protect him from sin. Finding his desire for
 The Wife engulfing him in a weak moment, he attempts to
 shake it off:

Heart! I grow fond myself! 'Twas well she waked me
 Before the dead sleep of adultery took me;
 'Twas stealing on me. Up, you honest thoughts,
 And keep watch for your master.
(I,ii,224-7)

But Eros is not a "fond, young boy." In fact, he is so
 powerful that Votarius and The Wife are sucked into the
 vortex of passion that they both know will cause them to
 "kiss destruction." Still, they struggle against it.
 Votarius especially feels remorse that he has allowed
 passion to usurp his own defenses: "All's gone! there's
 nothing but the prodigal left./ I have played away my
 soul at one short game. . . . How I could curse myself!"
 (II,ii,1-2;17) Yet, again Eros overpowers him, and only

four lines later, when The Wife enters, he recants: "Her very sight strikes my repentance backward." (II,i,21-2)

As the action progresses, these two lovers, like Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, become conditioned to sin and to self-indulgence. Two virtuous people degenerate into quarrelling, jealous weaklings who destroy personal relationships and build webs of deceit to cover their transgressions. The Wife humbles herself to her maid because she knows Leonella shares her guilty secret. Votarius loses respect for himself and ceases to love the man he once called "friend" because he envies him and covets his place as The Wife's husband: "I do not like his company now; tis irksome./ His eye offends me." (II,ii,83-4) He broods when Anselmus gives his wife a loving kiss: "He's too familiar with the face I love." (II,ii,93-4)

However, because they live in a world which will not tolerate sins such as theirs, they cannot break with convention and flaunt their love. Since they want to masquerade as honorable Christians while simultaneously communing at the alter of carnal passion, they devise a plan which will "prove" The Wife's faithfulness to Anselmus and thereby give their lust free reign. They stage an elaborate scene in which Votarius bursts into The Wife's room (ostensibly to "test" her for Anselmus' benefit),

declaring passionate love for her. She rages at him, orders him out of her room, and then pretends to stab him with a dagger Leonella has placed nearby. But their charade has become a deadly game; Leonella's lover, Bellarius, who happens to be Votarius' mortal enemy, has poisoned the dagger, and what was supposed to have been a small flesh wound proves fatal. Votarius dies, thinking his mistress has beguiled him. Anselmus, enraged at Leonella because she has told him that The Wife has been unchaste, leaps out of his hiding place and kills her. Bellarius then rushes out of his corner to challenge Anselmus, and the despairing Wife deliberately runs on the swords of the two men and dies, crying, "I come, Votarius." Bellarius and Anselmus subsequently kill each other. Not having heard The Wife's last words, Anselmus rejoices in her faithfulness and chastity as he is dying, but Bellarius enlightens him, and his final act is to cast her body away from himself, declaring, "Were my soul bid to joy's eternal banquet,/ And were assured to find thee there a guest,/ I'd sup with torments and refuse that feast."

"Love" has destroyed five people and has bred hatred between two friends, a servant and her mistress, and a husband and wife. The only person who hopes for reunion in death is The Wife, but there is little indication that

the love between Votarius and her will transcend death. In life, their love had been purely sensual; their spirits had never truly joined as The Lady's and Govianus' had. Death of their flesh is not victory, but destruction. Like Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores, they have sacrificed their honor, their consciences, and their lives on Eros' altar.

In his most practical moments, Middleton's attitude toward love aligned with Aristotle's. He saw it as an "excess of friendship," a comfortable affection between the sexes which makes life interesting and pleasant. However, since the prosaic concept offers perhaps a less interesting basis upon which a writer can build fiction, he drew upon the myriad of possibilities offered by the courtly love ideal which deified love and claimed for it special, magical qualities. For the most part, he did not regard courtly love precepts as proper expressions of love. In The Family of Love, he treated Gerardine and Maria with gentle derision, illustrating how ridiculous not only the lovers, but also the courtly love conceits can be when carried to extremes. In his other works, The Changeling and the secondary plot of The Second Maiden's Tragedy, he examined the brutal power of illicit passion and demonstrated how it can destroy and damn. Beatrice-

Joanna, De Flores, Votarius, and The Wife, as well as other figures in Women Beware Women barter their honor and their souls for ephemeral pleasure because they behold Eros as a greater divinity than Jehovah. Because they exist in the Christian world of Middleton's imagination rather than in the songs of medieval troubadours, they cannot hope to abide by the conventions of adulterous love and still expect to seek eternity with the Christian God. At their deaths, the divinities clash, and Jehovah proves to be the Absolute Godhead.

However, Middleton's youthful vision included an ideal love, a spiritual, yet romantic devotion between two people who understand that love transcends death and that the spirit ultimately triumphs over the corporal world and the evils which dwell there. Govianus and The Lady provide perfect expressions of consummate courtly love and Christian virtue, for their devotion to one another and to ultimate truth and goodness not only establishes them as romantic absolutes, but also ennobles and elevates them to the very pinnacle of the ideal the troubadours celebrated.

ENDNOTES

Chapter Four

1 Quoted in Richard Barber, The Knight and Chivalry, (Ipswich Mass.: Boydell Press, 1974), p. 47.

2 Michael Foss, Chivalry (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), p. 82.

3 Foss, p. 98.

4. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 14.

5 Barber, p. 73.

6 Foss, p. 87.

7 Ludwig Edelstein, The Meaning of Stoicism, Martin Classical Lectures Vol. 21. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 8ff.

8 Foss, pp. 97, 101.

9 The philosophy became known as "courtly love" because it was generally confined to the courts and was considered appropriate only to the upper classes.

10 Quoted in Foss, p. 110.

11 Barber, p. 135.

12 Quoted in Barber, p. 135.

13 Barber, p. 204

14 Lenora Leet Brodwin, Elizabethan Love Tragedy, 1587-1625 (New York; New York University Press, 1971), pp. 10ff.

15 The term "worldly love" was coined by L. Brodwin to distinguish it from courtly love. The most salient features of this type of love are that it is all-accepting, human, and marriage-oriented. See Elizabethan Love Tragedy, 1587-1625.

16 Quoted in Brodwin, p. 14.

17 Quoted in Brodwin, p. 21.

18 Arnold, p. 861.

19. Margot C. Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama Under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge: University Press, 1980), p. 190.

20 Phillip Stubbes, "A Short Treatise of Praiers and Supplications." part 1, in Shakespeare's England, The New Shakespeare Society, Series 4, ed. Frederic Furnivall (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1877-9), p. 226.

21 Certainly Macbeth and his wife begin the play as a loving couple. Part of the tragedy of Macbeth is the gradual alienation between them.

22 Heinemann, pp. 188-9.

23 Richard Levin, "The Elizabethan 'Three Level' Play," Renaissance Drama 2 (1969), 24.

- 24 Richard Levin, "The Family of Lust and The Family of Love," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 1 (1966), 318.
- 25 Anthony Covatta, Thomas Middleton's City Comedies (Lewisburg, N.Y.: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p. 64.
- 26 Levin, "The Family of Lust and The Family of Love," p. 318.
- 27 W.J. Olive, "Imitation of Shakespeare in Middleton's The Family of Love," Philological Quarterly, 29 (1950), 75; Baldwin Maxwell, "'Twenty Good-Nights'--The Knight of the Burning Pestle and Middleton's Family of Love," Modern Language Notes, 63 (1948), 233.
- 28 John F. McElroy, "Middleton, Entertainer or Moralist? An Interpretation of The Family of Love and Your Five Gallants," Modern Language Quarterly, 37 (1976), 39.
- 29 Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 183.
- 30 Penelope B.R. Droob, "A Reading of The Changeling," English Literary Renaissance, 3 (1973), 183-206; Brodwin, pp. 152ff; Roger Stilling, Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 251.
- 31 Samuel Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies: A Critical Study (New York: Gordian Press, 1970), p. 189.
- 32 Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama (London: Methuen & Co., 1958), p. 146.
- 33 Bawcutt, p. liii,

34 Ornstein, p. 187.

35 Joseph M. Duffy, "Madhouse Optics: The Changeling," Comparative Drama, 8 (1974), 188.

36 J.L. Simmons, "Diabolical Realism in Middleton and Rowley's The Changeling," Renaissance Drama, 11 (1980), 142.

37 S. Gorely Putt, The Golden Age of English Drama: Enjoyment of Elizabethan and Jacobean Plays (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), p. 116.

38 Paula Johnson, "Dissimulation Anatomized: The Changeling," Philological Quarterly, 56 (1977), 334.

39 The page could be referring to the fact that Govianus and The Lady are formally betrothed. Nevertheless, according to the convention of the Jacobean age, society allowed betrothed couples to consummate their love prior to the official wedding ceremony, so the pair would not have had any reason to feel guilty even if they had become lovers under this circumstance.

40 In III, 177, he speaks of her "virgin-victory" after she has thwarted The Tyrant by suicide, and in IV, iv, 37, he calls her "eternal maid of honour."

CONCLUSION

Although Thomas Middleton's plays provide a range of pleasures to the most casual viewer or reader, they can be more fully appreciated when one understands that his vision was tempered by profound moral and religious convictions. To identify him as an inflexibly orthodox Anglican seems inaccurate; official Church doctrine underwent dramatic changes during the two and one-half decades he was writing for the stage, and Middleton, like many Jacobean, held his religious beliefs too dear to alter them to accord with the changing whims of monarchs.

Primarily, his Christian vision leaned toward Calvinism. He had reached maturity at the end of the reign of Elizabeth I, when the Anglican Church had aligned itself with the Genevan model, and his plays continued to reflect a Calvinistic philosophy during his entire writing career. The more extreme of the Calvinist became known as Puritans, who formed a dissenting party within the Church during the latter part of the sixteenth and early years of the seventeenth centuries. Although basically loyal subjects, they never held complete sympathy with the crown and orthodox Anglicanism. Elizabeth did not like them because they wanted to abolish the ritual she loved and adopt more liberal ideals. Puritans

also were out of favor with many other segments of English society; the upper classes disliked them because most of them came from the prosperous middle class which was usurping their wealth and their long-held special privileges. Also, because they had attacked the immorality of stage plays and the irreligious, bawdy literature then popular in London, they alienated writers and players. These craftsmen enjoyed making them targets for satire and farce, and it soon became fashionable and profitable to mock them. Middleton may have found the Puritans amusing during those years, but he did not confuse them with the more threatening Anabaptists, who held what was considered heretical doctrines. This group's anti-government/anti-social ideas flew in the face of English orthodoxy and society's traditions, and most Englishmen and women considered them extremely dangerous. Middleton's first extant play, The Family of Love (1602), satirizes the heresies of that Anabaptist group only; no Puritans appear in this play, and although Middleton, as a playwright and a member of the upper class, may not have liked Puritan traits, he clearly did not associate them with heretics.

When James ascended the throne in 1603, he lacked the rapport with his subjects his predecessor had enjoyed. More

concerned with his own religious and political ideas and with improving foreign relations than in keeping England unified, he tended to disregard the concerns and ideals of the lower and middle classes. He liked the Puritans even less than Elizabeth had, and because he publicly ridiculed them, they fell into further social and political disfavor. Writers who composed with an eye toward pleasing James and the courtiers who attended the theatre unleashed vigorous assaults against the Puritan faction.¹ With The Puritan (1606) and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1611-3), Middleton disregarded the difference between Puritanism and Anabaptism and satirized traits of both religious groups, assigning them to characters he called "Puritans." Apparently, at that time he did not mind slandering Puritans for the sake of laughter. To him, they were simply a source for the fiction and satire now popular among his upper-class audiences.²

However, A Chaste Maid marks the end of his ridicule of the Puritans. During this time, James and the Anglican Church were moving away from Calvinistic doctrines and were embracing Arminian principles. To staunch Calvinists, this was anathema, because Arminianism seemed to them a step backward from the true faith and toward a close alignment with the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Puritan

party within the Church continued to champion Calvinism, many members of the orthodox Church who had long been content with the Genevan model came to align themselves with the Puritan element. At the same time, Middleton was becoming more closely acquainted with London's Puritan city fathers. In 1611 he began a long association with them as one of their most frequently employed writers, and he created many of the Lord Mayor's pageants and city entertainments. By 1615-20, when he wrote Hengist, King of Kent, he obviously had changed his attitude toward Puritanism. While he had treated it as a minor and perhaps dangerous faction to be satirized in his earlier plays, he now softened his position. Although Middleton could create a ludicrous portrait of dour Oliver in Hengist, he did not treat him as a dangerous heretic, or even a hypocrite.

By 1624, James had nearly completely alienated himself from his middle-class, Calvinist subjects. He had introduced unwelcome ideas into the national religion, had set himself up as absolute monarch over English citizens' religious beliefs, and was attempting to ally England with her most despised enemy, Catholic Spain. Middleton composed A Game at Chess (1624) in answer to James' attempts at an alliance with Spain, and it clearly illustrates the poet's negative response to Roman Catholicism, Spain, and the

possibility of a Spanish Queen of England. No longer did the playwright align his political and religious views with the king's; he had joined the growing number of Englishmen and women who defied the new orthodoxy, maintaining their Calvinistic theology and considering Catholicism and the Pope as manifestations of ultimate evil.

As a writer, scholar, and member of the gentry, Middleton also was interested in other religious traditions which had been preserved and perpetrated in aristocratic cliques and in literature. Particularly, he became intrigued with the doctrines of chivalric honor and courtly love. Because all English gentlemen and noblemen held the concepts of honor dear, Middleton also embraced the code and adhered to most of its precepts, but only as an ideal based upon moral virtues. He considered many of its aspects artificial and perverted by unchristian influences. In The Second Maiden's Tragedy (1611), he seems to glorify virtue, chastity, and spirituality as points of honor, but rejects the mandates which cause obsession with titles, power, wealth, and reputation. Also, he indicates a regard for the "sacred" honor ideal of blood revenge for base injuries. Later, in A Fair Quarrel (1615-17), his views remain consistent but somewhat tempered by time and experience. Here, he values the careful preservation of social

reputation, but maintains that an honorable person will find and preserve his virtues through God. In The Changing (1622), Middleton's idealism gives way to a pessimistic vision of people who have no conception of the true meaning of honor, but have manipulated the external precepts of the code to justify immoral behavior. Also, his views toward blood revenge change. Here, God alone has the wisdom and power to avenge injustices.

While Middleton approved of the basic premises which gave life to the honor code, he approved of very few courtly love ideals. To him, obsessive carnal love weakens moral fiber and eventually destroys the soul. Although he found the Platonic ideal of spiritual love attractive, the tenets of late medieval courtly love, adultery and obsessive desire, ran contrary to his most basic beliefs. While many of his comic characters freely indulge their sexual appetites, he found many occasions to reprove carnality and salaciousness. In The Second Maiden's Tragedy, he juxtaposes true, spiritual love against lust, demonstrating that love based upon spiritual union and devotion to God provides the strength to triumph over evil and death. On the other hand, love based upon adulterous physical desire debases and destroys. Lovers who allow themselves to be seduced by Eros find themselves doomed to a life of deceit and

treachery, and because they have not learned to love with their spirits as well as with their bodies, they cannot hope to be reunited after death. The Changeling also demonstrates how destructive lust can be. Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores both abandon true religion to pay homage to Eros, and in his name, they commit fornication, adultery, and murder. However, unlike The Wife and Votarius of The Second Maiden's Tragedy, who never communicate on more than a superficial level, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are "spiritually" attuned to one another. From the beginning, their deepest instincts tell them they are kindred souls, and they so wholeheartedly give in to their evil natures that they are caught up in complete obsession with carnality. Their souls become twisted together, and when they meet their ends, they can look forward to a "Platonic union" in hell.

While these tragedies treat the courtly love conventions seriously and condemn those aspects Middleton considered immoral, The Gerardine/Maria plot of The Family of Love simply ridicules the convention. Nowhere else in the Middleton canon can we find such excessively romantic conceits as in the dialogue between Gerardine and Maria. They twitter and coo with comical zest, and somehow, amid all their long, flowery speeches praising the religion of

love, they manage to get down to the more practical matter of satisfying their lust. The minor farcical plot also satirizes the courtly love ideal; Lipsalve and Gudgeon are a travesty of courtiers who search for a "noble lady" to "love." Throughout, the message is consistent: love is more than exaggerated metaphors and a coupling of bodies; those who limit it to these are either foolish or immoral.

Middleton's forte was not his ability to preach moral lessons or create noble and virtuous heroes. Govianus and The Lady, The Phoenix (The Phoenix, 1602-4), Constantius (Hengist, King of Kent, 1615-20), and Cleanthes and Hippolita (The Old Law, 1616-8), are flat and uninteresting compared to such diabolical characters as De Flores, Livea (Women Beware Women, 1620-7), Francisca (The Witch, 1610-6), and Allwit (A Chaste Maid, 1611-3). He never created a Hamlet or a Prince Hal, but his "villains" approach Iago with their compelling, mysterious natures.

Consequently, Middleton was far more adept at satire and irony and at making his points by negation rather than by affirmation. The Wife and Votarius, as well as many others, suffer and die for their adultery; other characters, such as The Tyrant, De Flores, and Beatrice-Joanna, who commit worse crimes, are punished accordingly. Because his best plays do not tell us of what he approved, but demonstrate

the horror or the consequences of actions of which he disapproved, the discovery of Middleton's religious beliefs may be difficult, but the search for them always proves interesting.

This study has been limited by the question of which plays or portions of plays were actually written by Thomas Middleton. While it has established a relatively clear concept of his attitudes toward the religions associated with the spectrum of Christianity, the honor ideal, and courtly love, it would have more completely explored subtle nuances of his moral and religious beliefs if a positively accurate cannon had been established. Many scholars have examined his city comedies and his great tragedies, The Changeling and Women Beware Women, but many other Middleton plays possibly exist to shed more light upon the vision of this gifted writer. Perhaps before anyone can more fully ascertain Middleton's biases and beliefs, we must determine exactly what he contributed to that great body of Elizabethan and Jacobean literature.

ENDNOTES

Conclusion

1

Elbert N.S. Thompson, The Controversy Between the Puritans and the Stage, Yale Studies in English, vol. 20 (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1903), p. 128.

2

At this time, Middleton was writing exclusively for the Children of Paul's company, whose audiences consisted primarily of the upper class.

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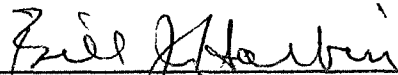
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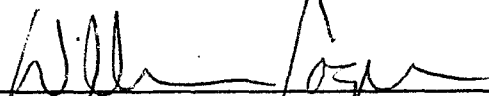
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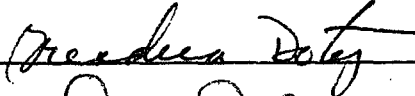
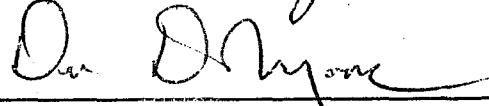
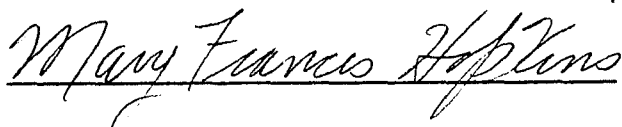
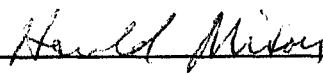
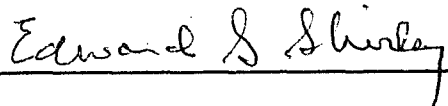
Title of Thesis: The Role of Religions and Cults in the Plays of Thomas Middleton

Approved:


Major Professor and Chairman


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

13 December 1983